

Demographic Change in the Arab/Persian Gulf: A Case Study by Country

Bahrein, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen.

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It is hard for anyone who has not traveled extensively in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) over a period of decades to realize just how much each nation in the region has changed in terms of basic demographics. There has been a massive increase in population in every MENA country since the end of World War II and the colonial period, and the nations in the Arab/Persian Gulf are no exception.

There are no precise figures for population growth that are fully reliable, but the broad trends are still clear. Many MENA countries have never had a credible census, and even reliable broad estimates of population trends only became available for many countries in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Work by the UN and World Bank is now reliable enough, however, to show that all MENA countries experienced massive increases in population through 2021 and that the resulting pressures on their economies, governance, and social stability has been -- *and will be* -- a key factor affecting their stability.

The World Bank and UN estimates summarized in the graphs in this report do indicate, however, that there is a near certainty that population pressure will present growing problems through at least 2020. The same is true of the other demographic data and estimates the authors could find.ⁱ

What is far less clear is how well given nations can adapt, and how some alternative forces will change the nature of each country's population problems. The World Bank and UN estimates do not address the interactions between population growth and the level of stability and violence in given countries, and this present major problems in Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.

These projections do assume that population growth rates will be affected by the cost of living in urban areas, but do not assess the impact of problems in development, job creation, and urban services. They do not address key limits on growth like water supplies, or the impact of climate change and the growing concern of expert that many MENA states will come under pressure for climate migration by 2050.ⁱⁱ

Population Growth, Security, and Stability

At the same time, there has been surprisingly little attention to the impacts of this growth in recent years in estimates of MENA country stability and security. If anything, the potential impact of massive population growth was of far greater concern in the 1950s to 1970s than it is today. This not only true of the level of concern over its impact on economic development planning, but of its impact on political analyses of internal stability.

Today, many studies on MENA country stability and security focus almost exclusively on the current political and economic situation and ignore the impact of past and future population growth on the need for economic growth, particularly for added jobs, social services, infrastructure, and effective governance.

They tend to ignore the extent to which population growth has put major strains on governance, has led to far more interaction between different sectarian, ethnic, and tribal groups, and has transformed the characteristics of every state in the MENA region. Most notably, it has led to massive increases in urbanization and participation in the market economy. While many elements of traditional culture and social practices remain, every country in the region has been forced to adapt to a very different economic structure, need for literacy and modern education, and contact with outside values.

Many studies also ignore the extent to which such population growth continues. The graphs presented in this analysis show that it will continue at high rates through at least 2030, and parametric analysis shows a vast range of different potential futures for each MENA country. Population growth may begin to decline after 2050, but it may also continue to sharply increase. The need to make hard decisions about population planning is even more real today than it had been in the past.

The Arab/Persian Gulf as a Case Study

This analysis is part of a three-volume series of graphic estimates of the trends in population growth that covers all of the MENA region. This volume provides a country-by-country portrait of the population trends in the Arab/Persian Gulf – including Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Yemen.

A snapshot of current CIA estimates of population-related data is provided for each country, and then graphs that show the trends in total population and several other key trends shaped by population growth. Additional graphs show the trends in growth for ages 15 to 24 years – the key age group affecting the need for new and different jobs. They also show the trends for ages 65 and above which will soon lead to massive increases in the dependency ratios and need for income and aid to adults outside of the work force. And they show the trends in urbanization and limits, or decline, in agricultural and self-sufficient workers.

The graphs cover the period of 1950 to 2021 – with UN projections to 2050 and 2100. They collectively illustrate the importance of addressing demographic trends, and the dangers inherent in analyses of politics, governance, development, and security issues which are effectively a snapshot of the present.

The Impact of Massive Population Growth

At the same time, there are limits to the trend data that are now available. Projections beyond 2030-2040 are inherently uncertain, and cannot anticipate changes in governance, social structures and family size, and a host of other factors. The parametric data for total population in the original UN estimates covered 2021-2100. They seem to represent the state of the art in such long-term estimates. However, the projections beyond 2050 are so uncertain that the UN graphs for total population have been edited to focus on periods from 2021 to 2050 where population momentum does most to reduce such uncertainty while the other UN graphs do project to 2100 – illustrating just how uncertain the data become.

It should be stressed that while some CIA data are provided, the authors concluded that there are insufficient data to show the trends in how population increases have affected the tensions between ethnic, sectarian, tribal and other sources of friction between factions, that have resulted from changes in location and their economic and political role because of population size.

As sources like the *CIA World Factbook* make clear, estimates of even the current divisions within a given nation's population are often uncertain, but there is no doubt that that population pressure has affected the divisions within many populations in cases like Iraq and Yemen, and will continue to do so in the future.

There has been comparatively little effort to fully analyze the impact of past and projected population growth on real-world levels of poverty and the equity of income distribution, educational opportunities. The same is true of job opportunities, health care, representation in

government, and share of development funding and aid. In many cases, national reporting in these areas is erratic, limited, or even lacks estimates with an adequate census or polling effort.

Some analyses focus on economic growth as if trends like the growth in percent of GDP and total national income per capita, could properly address these issues. Others have treated metrics like per capita income and poverty as if population growth and urbanization were not making fundamental changes how the growth of the population interacts with shifts in foreign labor, refugees, and the internally displaced.

It should be noted that the UN graphs that display parametric projections beyond 2021 portray significant ranges of uncertainty and differences in the future levels of population pressure involved by country. They also ignore the pressures to reduce the use of fossil fuels to limit the impact of climate change – a source of major uncertainty in estimating the future ability of petroleum exporting states to deal with population growth. However, the UN projections for most countries are certainly accurate enough to warn that the pressures caused by the need to deal with young populations will continue to present major problems in most countries through at least 2030, and warn that they could cause serious political unrest indefinitely into the future

Youth at Ages 15-24 and the Demand for Labor versus Aging Over 65 years and Massive Increases in Dependence on Others or the State for Income

The graphs showing the trends in ages 15-24 show that population growth has often led to total populations that are very young, and ones where the number of young men and women trying to enter the labor force have sharply increased the demand for advanced education and market-driven jobs. In many countries, this demand has sharply exceeded supply, and the UN's Arab Development Reports are only one of the many sources highlighting the shortfalls in youth employment and the resulting anger.

At the same time, the graphs for the growth in population in the population that is aged 65 and above show the effect of improved medical services and life spans and that they will lead to major -- and sometimes massive -- increases in the population over 65. Most of this population will not expect to work beyond this age. The graphs show that this is already creating a problem in several countries, but the growing burden of dependency could reach the crisis level after 2030-2040 if several nations do not expand their level of economic development and income, and create suitable social policy.

Shifting from Agriculture to a Market Driven System

The last set of graphs for each country shows that population pressure has combined with fundamental changes in the global economy to make nation-wide shifts away from nearly self-sufficient agriculture to petroleum and service industries, and done so with only a limited increase in manufacturing output.

With some exceptions, studies by the UN's Arab Human Development Reports, Arab Barometer, and other polls and sources show that job creation has not met growing needs, that most nations have lagged in providing adequate levels of development, and that the quality of governance has not kept up with the radically changing patterns in national needs -- while work by Transparency International and the World Bank show that the end result has been growing corruption and a

decline in governance -- and sometimes help push nations to the near breakdown of national political structures and even civil war.

This is not the case for some of the wealthiest petroleum exporting states, notably Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. They have developed both their petroleum sectors and other aspects of their economies, and both Saudi Arabia and Qatar have major economic development and modernization plans, although Saudi Arabia's efforts include a large number of major showpiece programs of dubious potential cost-effectiveness.

“Oil wealth,” however, is relative. Bahrain's reserves are very limited and it is dependent on Saudi support. Iran has mismanaged its economy, and Iraq has largely squandered its petroleum wealth on massive state sector efforts, war, and political upheavals ever since 1980. Oman's reserves are limited compared to its population growth, and Yemen's massive population growth and instability have sharply limited its development and the benefits it could draw from its relatively small petroleum export income.

Governments Have Often Failed to Meet the Needs of their Peoples

Finally, the impact of population growth is shaped largely by the quality of governance and its development efforts. Regional and national public opinion polls highlight the extent to which the population of many states -- including virtually every low-income state that permits public polling -- feels that government is failing them to some degree -- often to the point where affording basic foodstuffs is a serious problem. The Arab Barometer, and an Arab Human Development Report entitled *Citizenship 360° in the Arab Region*, are just a few of the examples of such polling.ⁱⁱⁱ

There is no way to know how the extent to which the problems most MENA governments are now having with their own people. And popular unrest, and demonstrations, are driven by population growth. Population pressure is only one factor among many. At the same time, various UN Arab Development Reports warned long before the “Arab Spring” that population pressure and the need for jobs was creating growing instability, and it is all too clear from the trends involved that there are few reasons to believe most MENA governments are prepared to meet the challenges of further population increases and changes in the demographic and urban character of their countries.

Table of Contents

POPULATION GROWTH, SECURITY, AND STABILITY.....	1
THE ARAB/PERSIAN GULF AS A CASE STUDY	2
THE IMPACT OF MASSIVE POPULATION GROWTH.....	2
YOUTH AT AGES 15-24 AND THE DEMAND FOR LABOR VERSUS AGING OVER 65 YEARS AND MASSIVE INCREASES IN DEPENDENCE ON OTHERS OR THE STATE FOR INCOME	3
SHIFTING FROM AGRICULTURE TO A MARKET DRIVEN SYSTEM.....	3
GOVERNMENTS HAVE OFTEN FAILED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR PEOPLES	4
BAHRAIN.....	6
BAHRAIN: TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH ESTIMATES (IN MILLIONS).....	7
BAHRAIN: WARNING SIGNS: ENTRY TO LABOR FORCE AGE	8
AND SENIORS 65 AND OVER	8
BAHRAIN: SHIFTS FROM RURAL TO URBAN MARKET-DRIVEN POPULATION	9
KUWAIT	10

KUWAIT: TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH ESTIMATES (IN MILLIONS)	11
KUWAIT: WARNING SIGNS: ENTRY TO LABOR FORCE AGE.....	12
AND SENIORS 65 AND OVER	12
KUWAIT: SHIFTS FROM RURAL TO URBAN MARKET-DRIVEN POPULATION.....	13
IRAN	14
IRAN: TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH (IN MILLIONS)	15
IRAN: WARNING SIGNS: ENTRY TO LABOR FORCE AGE	16
AND SENIORS 65 AND OVER	16
IRAN: SHIFTS FROM RURAL TO URBAN MARKET-DRIVEN POPULATION	17
IRAQ	18
IRAQ: TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH (IN MILLIONS)	19
IRAQ: WARNING SIGNS: ENTRY TO LABOR FORCE AGE	20
AND SENIORS 65 AND OVER	20
IRAQ: SHIFTS FROM RURAL TO URBAN MARKET-DRIVEN POPULATION	21
OMAN.....	22
OMAN: TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH ESTIMATES (IN MILLIONS)	23
OMAN: WARNING SIGNS: ENTRY TO LABOR FORCE AGE AND	24
SENIORS 65 AND OVER	24
OMAN: SHIFTS FROM RURAL TO URBAN MARKET-DRIVEN POPULATION	25
QATAR	26
QATAR: TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH (IN MILLIONS)	27
QATAR: WARNING SIGNS: ENTRY TO LABOR FORCE AGE	28
AND SENIORS 65 AND OVER	28
QATAR: SHIFTS FROM RURAL TO URBAN MARKET-DRIVEN POPULATION	29
SAUDI ARABIA	30
SAUDI ARABIA: TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH (IN MILLIONS)	31
SAUDI ARABIA: WARNING SIGNS: ENTRY TO LABOR FORCE AGE	32
AND SENIORS 65 AND OVER	32
SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS, HTTPS://POPULATION.UN.ORG/WPP/GRAPHS/PROBABILISTIC/POP/TOT/682	32
SAUDI ARABIA: SHIFTS FROM RURAL TO URBAN MARKET-DRIVEN POPULATION	33
UAE.....	34
UAE: TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH (MILLIONS)	35
UAE: WARNING SIGNS: ENTRY TO LABOR FORCE AGE	36
AND SENIORS 65 AND OVER	36
UAE: SHIFTS FROM RURAL TO URBAN MARKET-DRIVEN POPULATION	37
YEMEN.....	38
YEMEN: TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH (IN MILLIONS)	39
YEMEN: WARNING SIGNS: ENTRY TO LABOR FORCE AGE,.....	40
AND SENIORS 65 AND OVER	40
YEMEN: SHIFTS FROM RURAL TO URBAN MARKET-DRIVEN POPULATION.....	41

Bahrain

Bahrain is a small island country that was one of the first Gulf states to export petroleum, and it has exported much of its reserves. It depends on Saudi Arabia for much of its current petroleum supplies, freed for its refineries, and support in areas like its ship building and repair industries. It has a Shi'ite majority but is ruled by a Sunni monarchy. Its native population is deeply divided, and both Saudi Arabi and the UAE have assisted the regime in dealing with Shi'ite popular dissent.

There is comparatively limited youth pressure for more jobs, but there is serious concern among the Shi'ite population that the regime favors foreign labor and Sunnis. The rise in over age 65s is a different story. There will be a serious rise in dependency as the population ages.

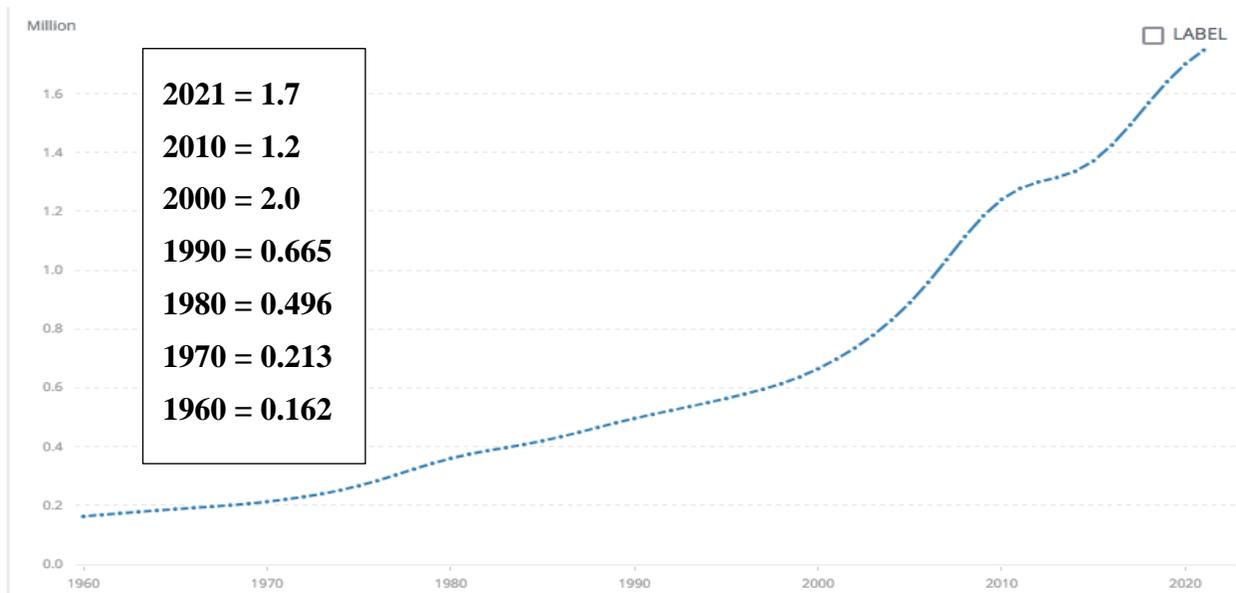
Population pressure has already eased. The country is already close to its maximum level of urbanization relative to rural areas and agriculture.

Snapshot of Key Factoids from the CIA Factbook (accessed August 2022)

- **Population distribution:** Smallest population of the Gulf States, but urbanization rate exceeds 90%; largest settlement concentration is found on the far northern end of the island in and around Manamah and Al Muharraq
- **Foreign population:** Immigrants make up approximately 45% of the total population, according to UN data (2019)
- **Ethnic groups:** Bahraini 46%, Asian 45.5%, other Arab 4.7%, African 1.6%, European 1%, other 1.2% (includes Gulf Co-operative country nationals, North and South Americans, and Oceanians) (2010 est.)
- **Sectarian groups:** No data
- **Dependency ratios:** Youth 23.1%, 65 and over 3.4%
- **Median Age:** 32.9 years
- **Population growth rate:** 0.88%
- **Literacy:** 97.5%
- **School life expectancy: (primary to tertiary):** 16 years
- **Urbanization:** 89.7%
- **Urbanization Growth Rate:** 1.99%
- **GDP per capita:** \$40,900
- **GDP Composition:** (2017): Agriculture: 0.3%, Industry: 39.3%, Services: 60.4%
- **Labor force by Occupation (2004):** Agriculture: 1.0%, Industry: 32%, Services: 67%
- **Overall Unemployment Rate:** 3.6%
- **Unemployment Youth ages 15-24:** 5.3% Male: 2.6%, Female: 12.2%

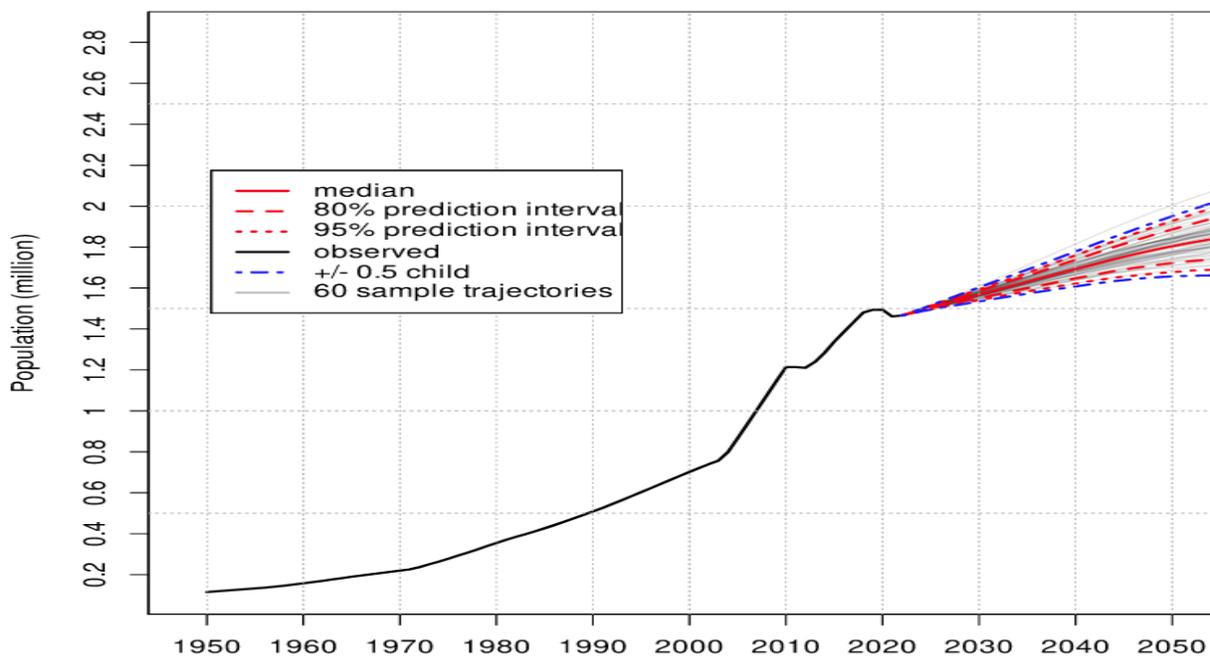
Bahrain: Total Population Growth Estimates (In Millions)

World Bank: 1960-2021



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=BH>

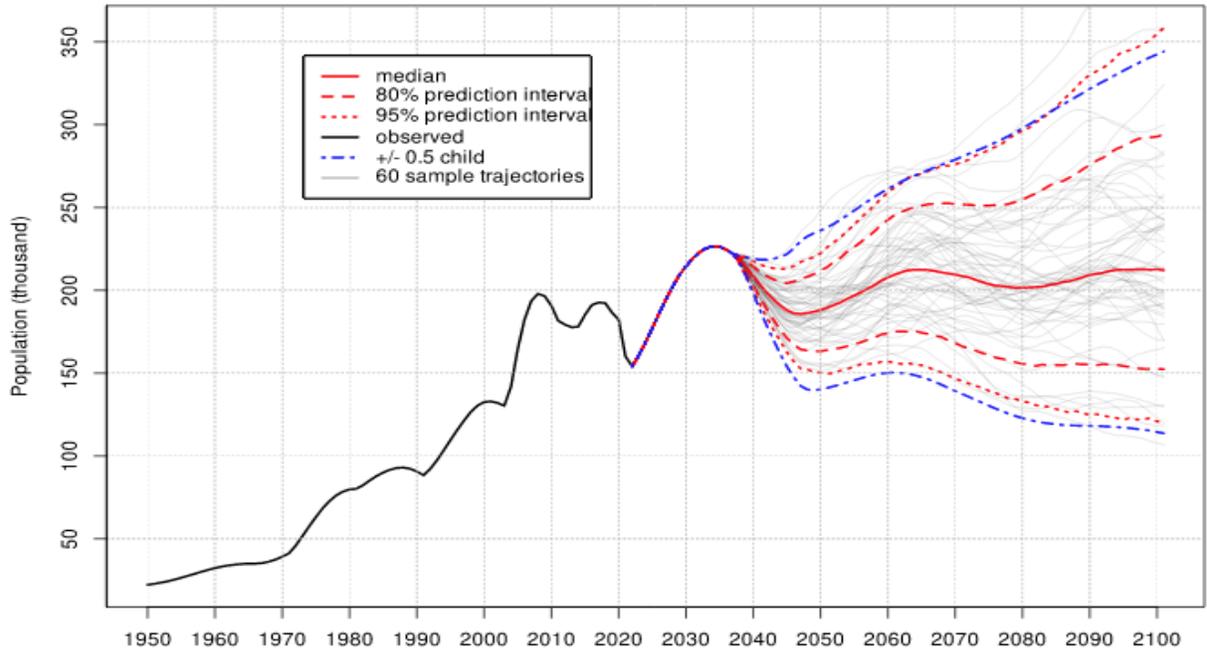
UN: 1950-2050



Source: United Nations, DESA Population Division, edited to limit projections to 2050, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/65plus/48..>

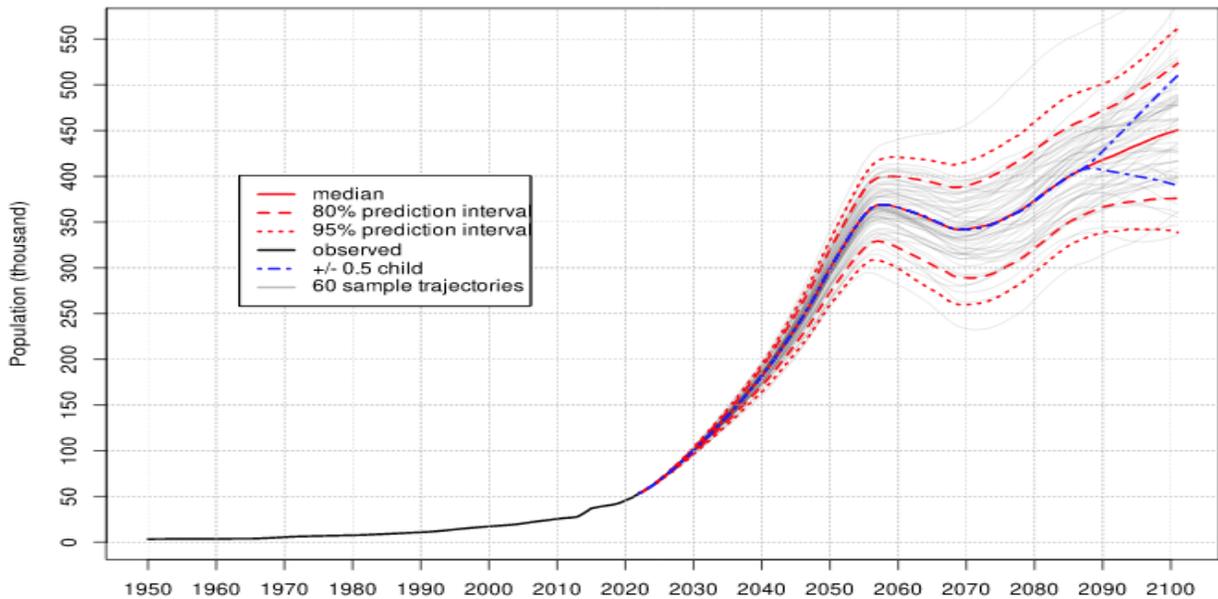
Bahrain: Warning Signs: Entry to Labor Force Age and Seniors 65 and Over

UN: Population Age 15-24



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United Nations, DESA, Population Division. *World Population Prospects 2022*. <http://population.un.org/wpp/>

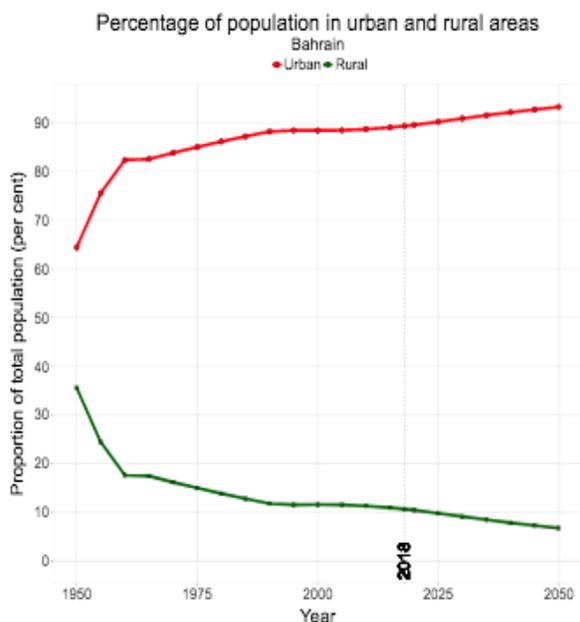
UN: Age 65 and Over



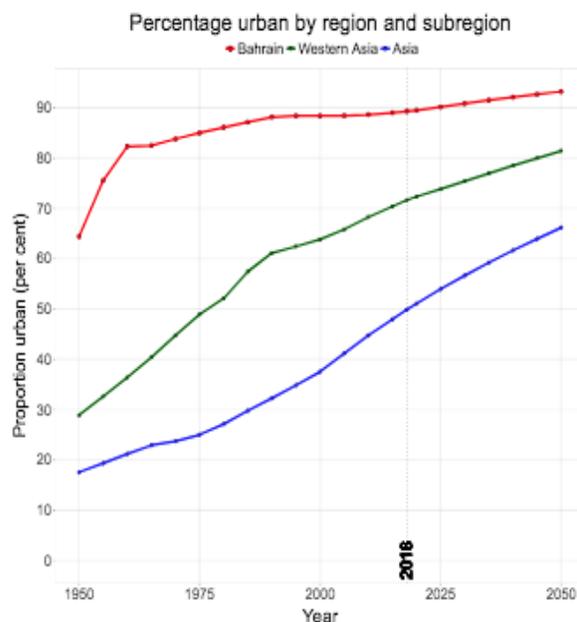
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United Nations, DESA, Population Division. *World Population Prospects 2022*. <http://population.un.org/wpp/>

Source: <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/65plus/48>

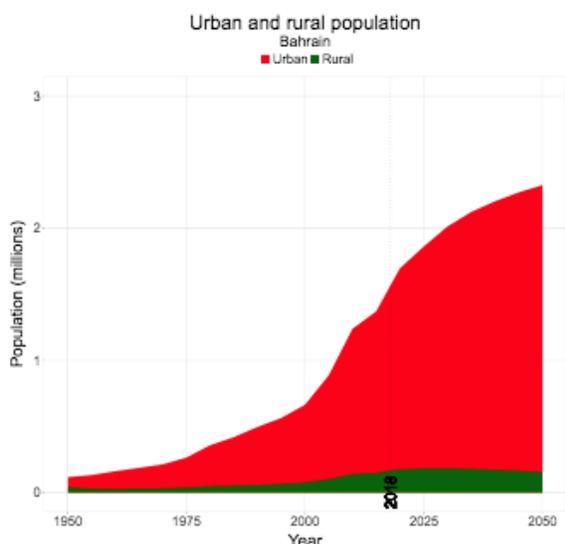
Bahrain: Shifts from Rural to Urban Market-Driven Population



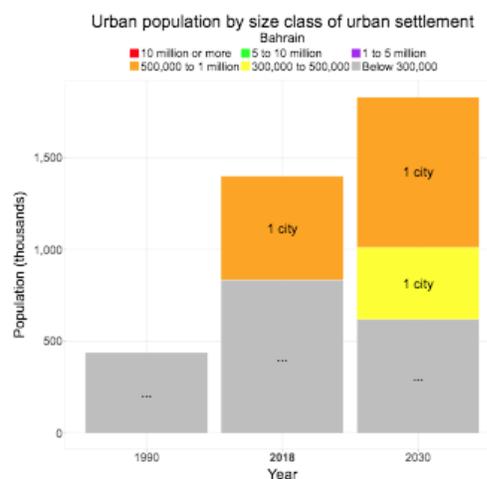
Note: Urban and rural population in the current country or area as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



Note: Proportion of urban population in the current country as compared to its subregion and region. The proportion is expressed as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



Note: Urban and rural population in the current country.



Note: Urban population by size class of urban settlement and number of cities, 1990, 2018 and 2030. The grey area is a residual category that includes all urban settlements with a population of less than 300,000 inhabitants.

Kuwait

Kuwait is a small country that was one of the first Gulf states to export petroleum, and still has major reserves. It has had the funds to develop a modern service economy centered around petroleum exports while investing in a major fund for the future.

Population increases are projected to drop over time, but to remain relatively high through 2050.

There is comparatively high youth pressure for more jobs through at least 2040. The rise in over age 65s is a similar and there will be a serious rise in dependency as the population ages.

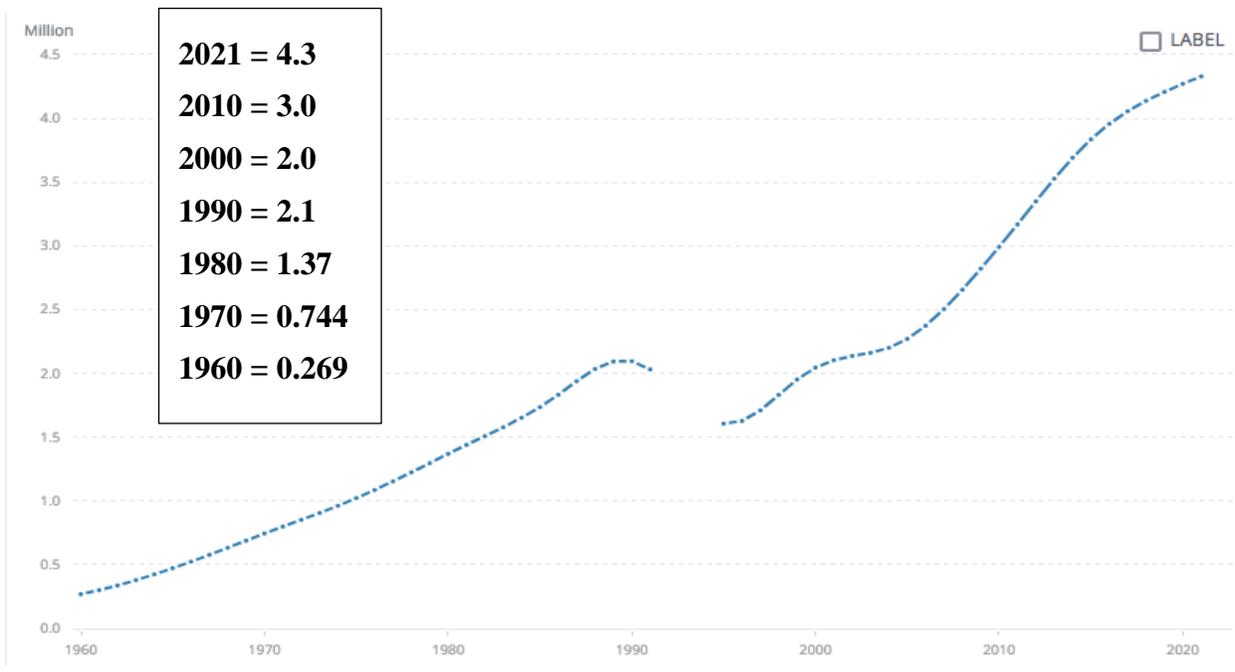
The country is already close to its maximum level of urbanization relative to its comparatively tiny rural areas and agriculture.

Snapshot of Key Factoids from the CIA Factbook (accessed August 2022)

- **Population distribution:** Densest settlement is along the Persian Gulf, particularly in Kuwait City and on Bubiyan Island; significant population threads extend south and west along highways that radiate from the capital, particularly in the southern half of the country
- **Foreign population:** About 72% of the population consists of immigrants
- **Ethnic groups:** Kuwaiti 30.4%, other Arab 27.4%, Asian 40.3%, African 1%, other 0.9% (includes European, North American, South American, and Australian) (2018 est.)
- **Sectarian groups:** Muslim (official) 74.6%, Christian 18.2%, other and unspecified 7.2% (2013 est.)
- **Dependency ratios:** total dependency ratio: 32.4 youth dependency ratio: 28.4 elderly dependency ratio: 4
- **Median Age:** 29.7 years
- **Population growth rate:** 1.17% (2022 est.)
- **Literacy:** 96.5%
- **School life expectancy: (primary to tertiary):** 15 years
- **Urbanization:** 100% of total population (2022)
- **Urbanization Growth Rate:** 1.35% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)
- **GDP per capita:** \$49,900 (2019 est.)
- **GDP Composition:** agriculture: 0.4% (2017 est.) industry: 58.7% (2017 est.) services: 40.9% (2017 est.)
- **Labor force by Occupation (2004):** NA
- **Overall Unemployment Rate:** 1.1% (2017 est.)
- **Unemployment Youth ages 15-24:** 15.4%

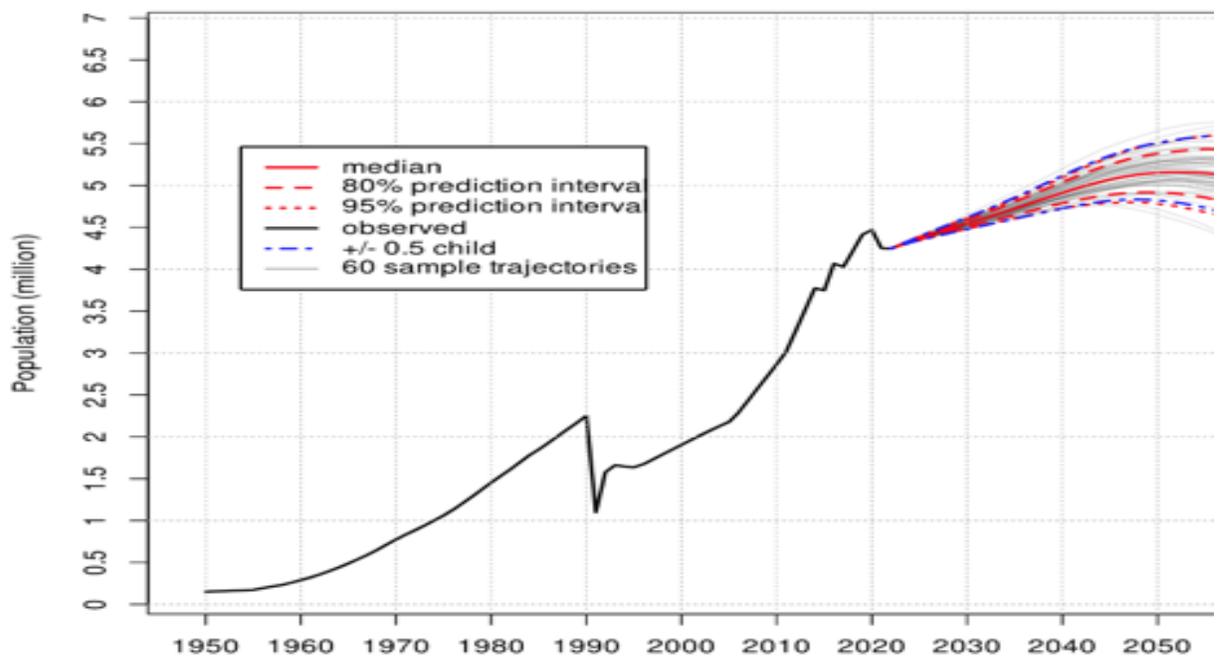
Kuwait: Total Population Growth Estimates (In Millions)

World Bank: 1960-2021



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=KW>

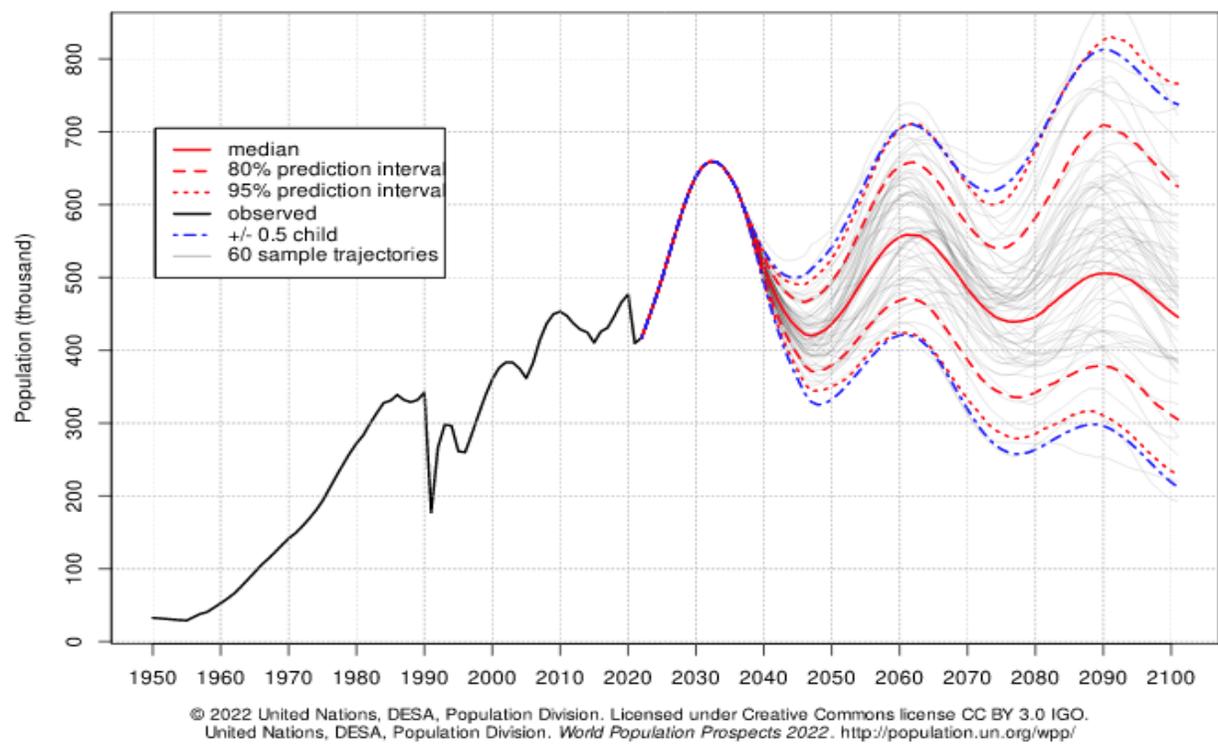
UN: 1950-2050



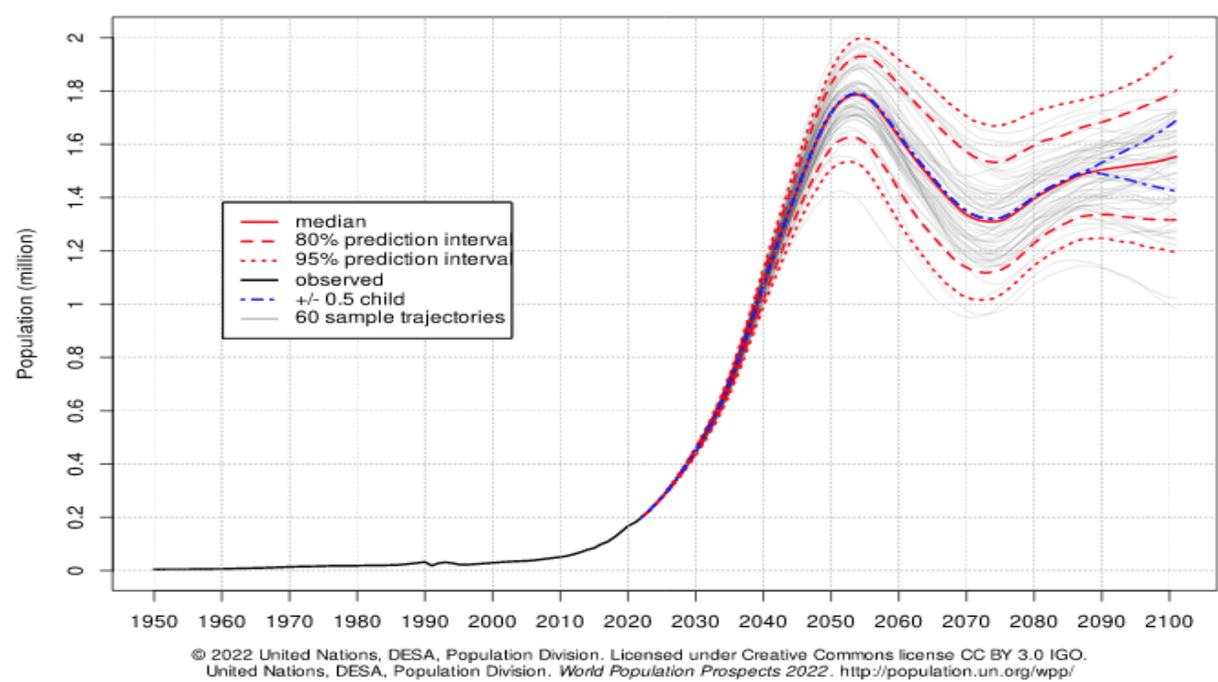
Source: United Nations, DESA Population Division, edited to limit projections to 2050, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/414>

Kuwait: Warning Signs: Entry to Labor Force Age and Seniors 65 and Over

UN: Population Age 15-24

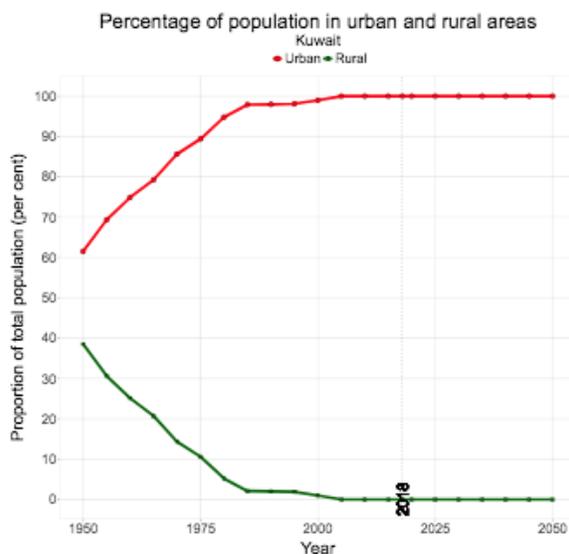


UN: Age 65 and Over

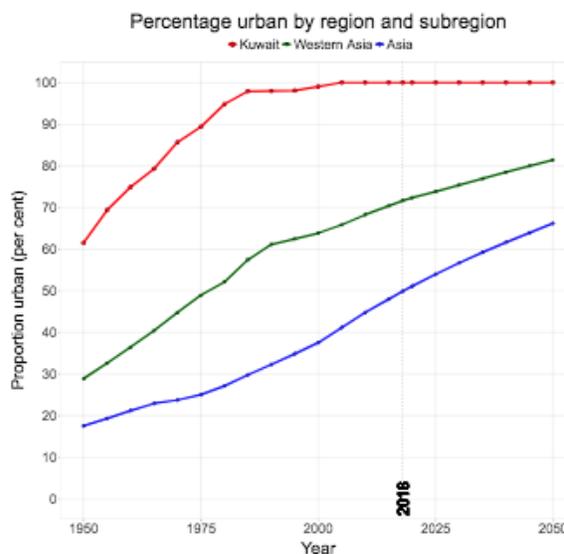
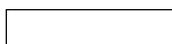


Source: <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/65plus/414>

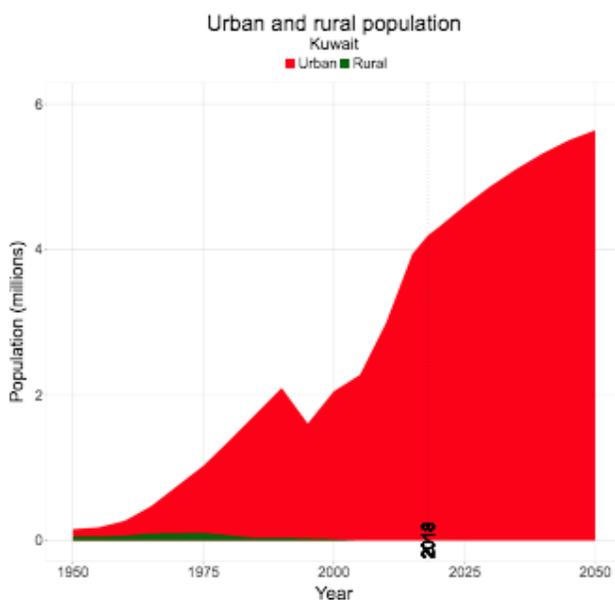
Kuwait: Shifts from Rural to Urban Market-Driven Population



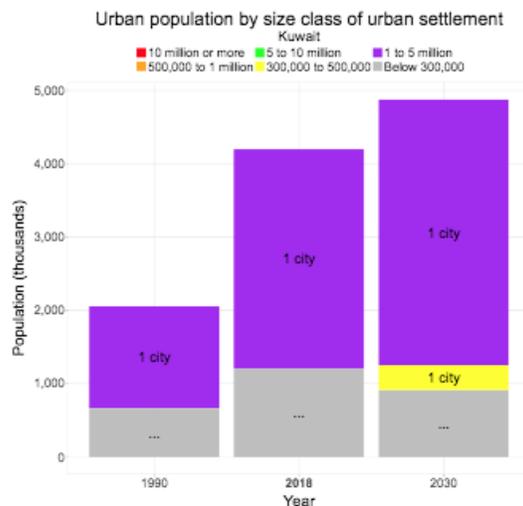
Note: Urban and rural population in the current country or area as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



Note: Proportion of urban population in the current country as compared to its subregion and region. The proportion is expressed as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



Note: Urban and rural population in the current country.



Note: Urban population by size class of urban settlement and number of cities, 1990, 2018 and 2030. The grey area is a residual category that includes all urban settlements with a population of less than 300,000 inhabitants.

Iran

Iran is a large, diverse state, and a major energy exporter, but it has faced war, long periods of poorly managed development since 1980, and now faces U.S. sanctions over its nuclear program. Its relatively extreme ideology presents problems in both governance and the modernization of its economy for the future.

Total population increases are projected to be limited through 2050 and then drop over time.

There is comparatively low youth pressure for more jobs through at least 2040, and the pressure is projected drop after that time, but economic development has lagged and youth employment is a major issue. The rise in over the age of 65 is very high through 2050, and there will be a serious rise in dependency as the population ages.

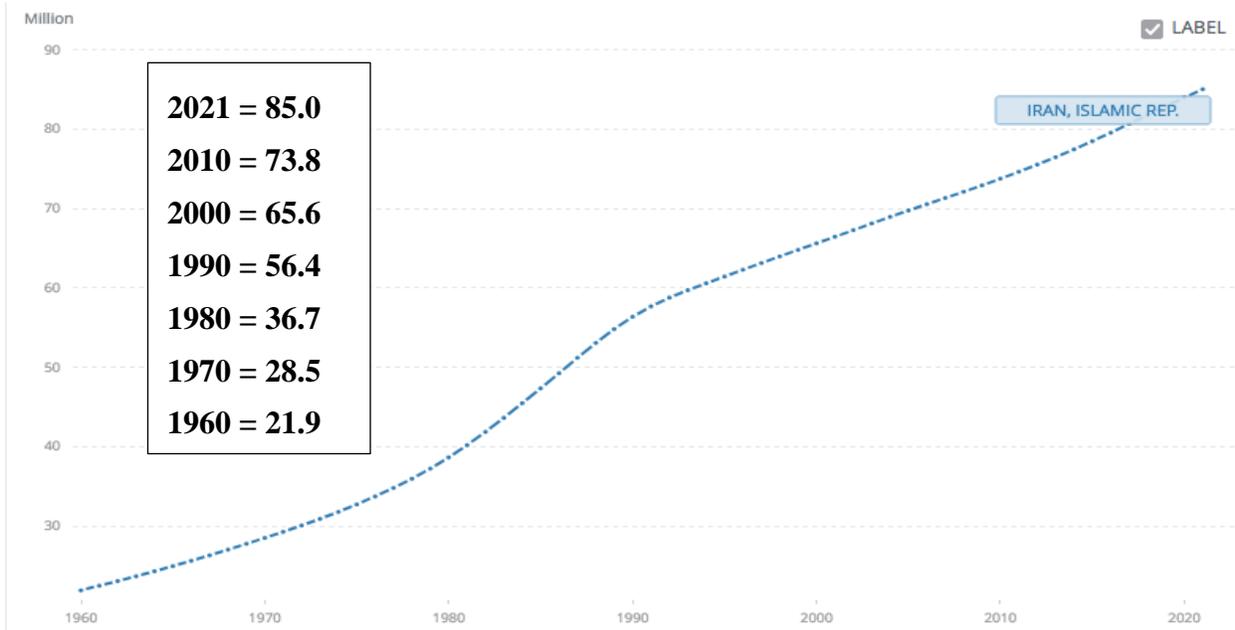
The country is already close to its maximum level of urbanization relative to its comparatively tiny rural areas and agriculture. Climate change and water supplies are a serious issue.

Snapshot of Key Factoids from the CIA Factbook (accessed August 2022)

- **Population distribution:** Population is concentrated in the north, northwest, and west, reflecting the position of the Zagros and Elburz Mountains; the vast dry areas in the center and eastern parts of the country, around the deserts of the Dasht-e Kavir and Dasht-e Lut, have a much lower population density
- **Foreign population:** NA
- **Ethnic groups:** Persian, Azeri, Kurd, Lur, Baloch, Arab, Turkmen, and Turkic tribes
- **Sectarian groups:** Muslim (official) 99.6% (Shia 90-95%, Sunni 5-10%), other (includes Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian) 0.3%, unspecified 0.2% (2016 est.)
- **Dependency ratios:** total dependency ratio: 45.6 youth dependency ratio: 36 elderly dependency ratio: 9.6
- **Median Age:** 31.7 years
- **Population growth rate:** 0.98% (2022 est.)
- **Literacy:** 85.5%
- **School life expectancy: (primary to tertiary):** 15 years
- **Urbanization:** 76.8% of total population (2022)
- **Urbanization Growth Rate:** 1.32% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)
- **GDP per capita:** \$12,400 (2020 est.)
- **GDP Composition:** (?): agriculture: 9.6% (2016 est.) industry: 35.3% (2016 est.) services: 55% (2017 est.)
- **Labor force by Occupation (2004):** agriculture: 16.3% industry: 35.1% services: 48.6% (2013 est.)
- **Overall Unemployment Rate:** 11.8% (2017 est.)
- **Unemployment Youth ages 15-24:** total: 23.7% male: 21.2% female: 36% (2020 est.)

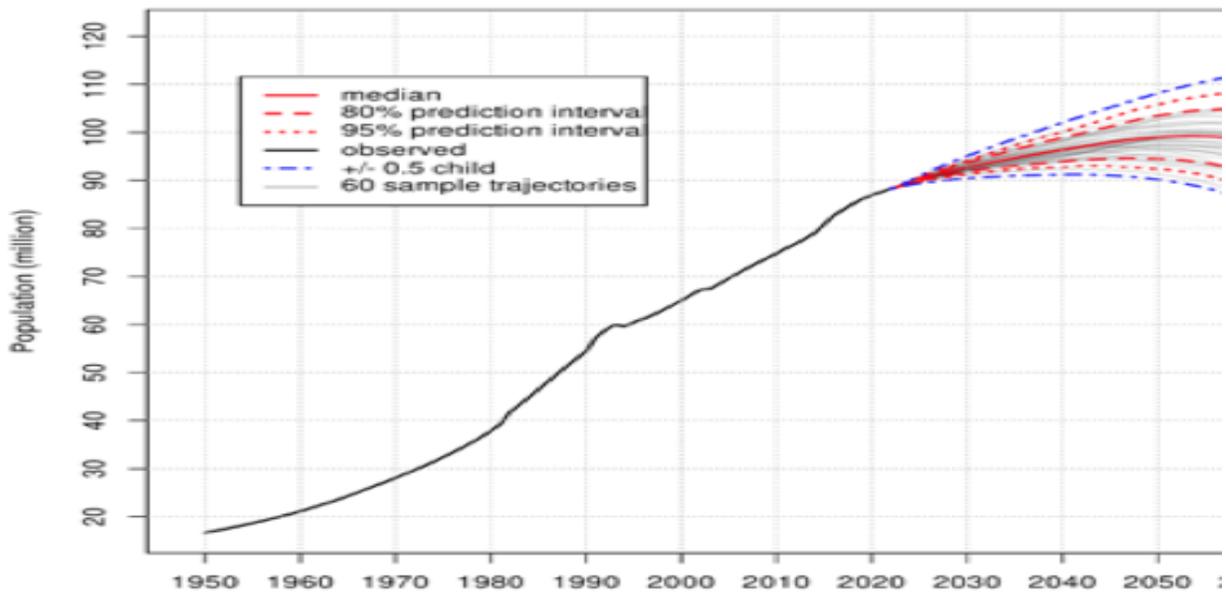
Iran: Total Population Growth (In Millions)

World Bank: 1960-2021



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=IN>

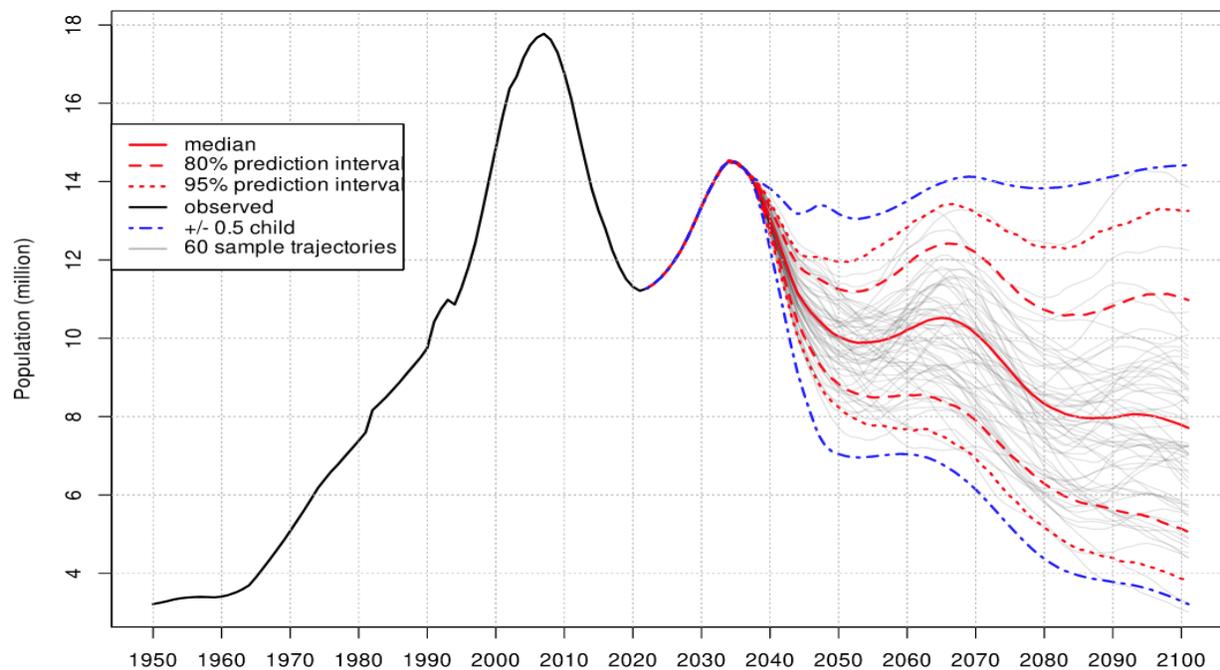
UN: 1950-2100



Source: United Nations, DESA Population Division, edited to limit projections to 2050, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/65plus/364>.

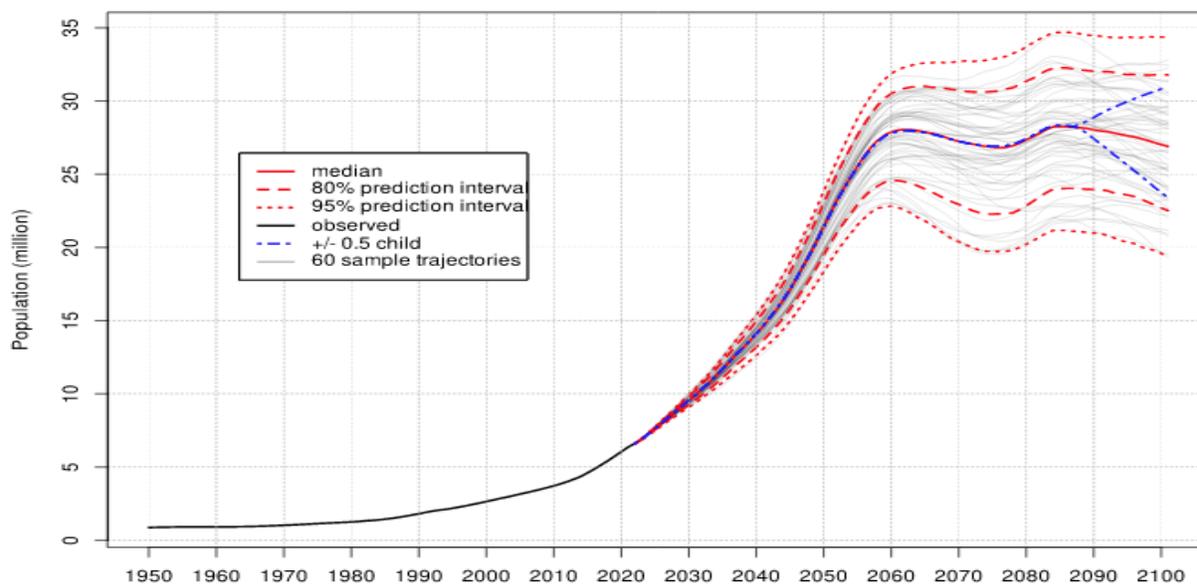
Iran: Warning Signs: Entry to Labor Force Age and Seniors 65 and Over

UN: Population Age 15-24



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United Nations, DESA, Population Division. *World Population Prospects 2022*. <http://population.un.org/wpp/>

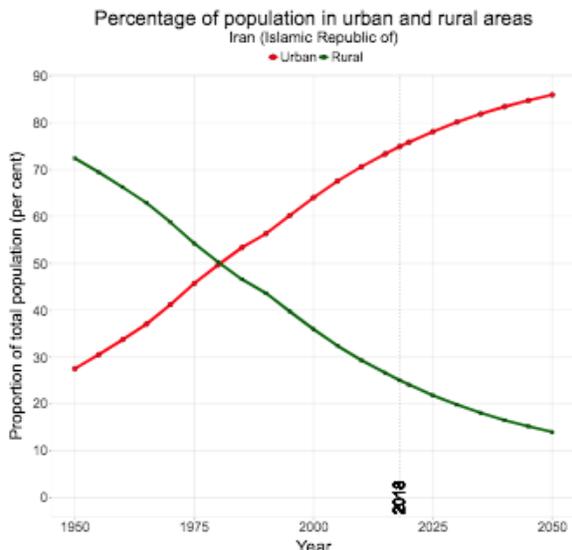
UN: Age 65 and Over



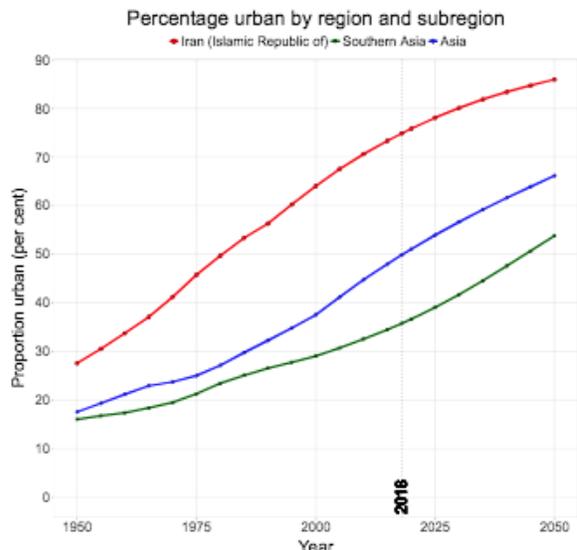
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United Nations, DESA, Population Division. *World Population Prospects 2022*. <http://population.un.org/wpp/>

Source: United Nations, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/15-24/364>.

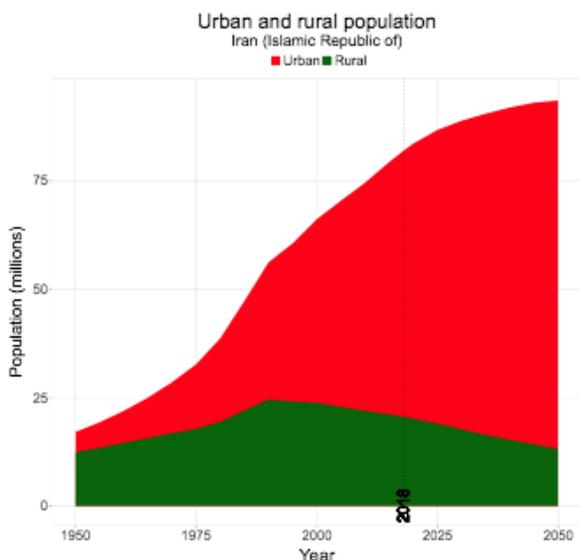
Iran: Shifts from Rural to Urban Market-Driven Population



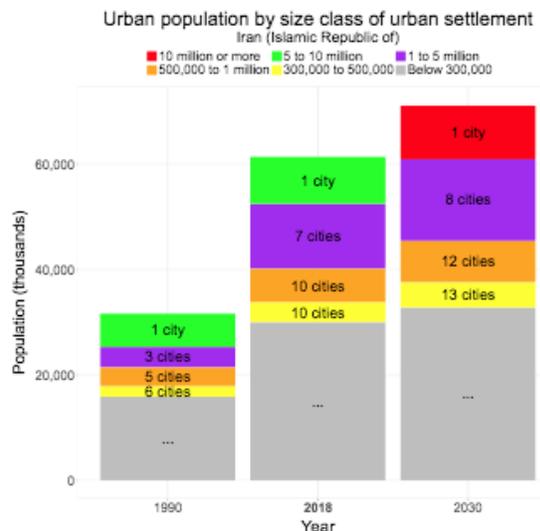
Note: Urban and rural population in the current country or area as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



Note: Proportion of urban population in the current country as compared to its subregion and region. The proportion is expressed as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



Note: Urban and rural population in the current country.



Note: Urban population by size class of urban settlement and number of cities, 1990, 2018 and 2030. The grey area is a residual category that includes all urban settlements with a population of less than 300,000 inhabitants.

Iraq

Iraq is a major petroleum exporter, but a series of wars and political crises has seriously limited its development and modernization since 1980. It still is in a prolonged political crisis, its petroleum wealth is poorly allocated by its government, and it has one of the largest and least effective structure of state industries in the MENA region.

Total population growth will remain high through at least 2050, and the population is deeply divided into Arab Sunnis, Arab Shi'ites, and Kurds – each with its own internal feuds and divisions.

Youth unemployment and under employment are already a critical problem, but projected future growth is limited. The projected increases in over the age of 65 are moderate, but dependency is already an issue and is poorly managed by the government.

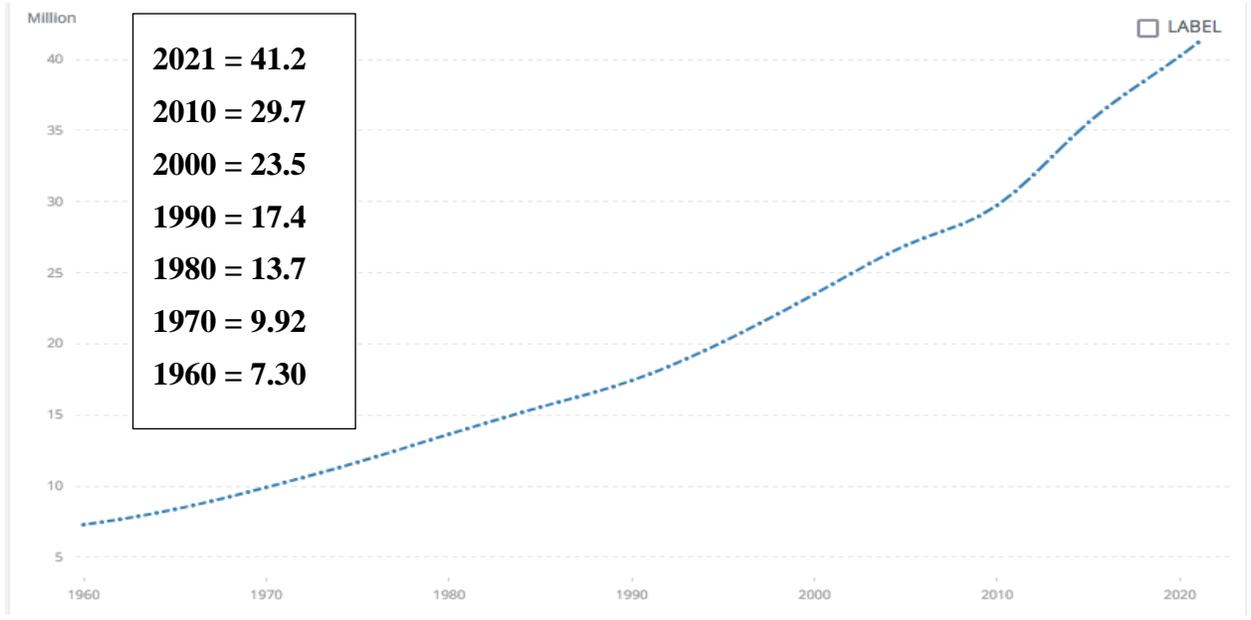
Urbanization is already a source of serious stress, but water and climate change limits agriculture further. A major shift to efficient and productive investment in industry and services is needed, but far more talked about than implemented

Snapshot of Key Factoids from the CIA Factbook (accessed August 2022)

- **Population distribution:** Population is concentrated in the north, center, and eastern parts of the country, with many of the larger urban agglomerations found along extensive parts of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers; much of the western and southern areas are either lightly populated or uninhabited
- **Foreign population:** NA
- **Ethnic groups:** Arab 75-80%, Kurdish 15-20%, other 5% (includes Turkmen, Yezidi, Shabak, Kaka'i, Bedouin, Romani, Assyrian, Circassian, Sabaean-Mandaean, Persian)
- **Sectarian groups:** Muslim (official) 95-98% (Shia 61-64%, Sunni 29-34%), Christian 1% (includes Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Assyrian Church of the East), other 1-4% (2015 est.)
- **Dependency ratios:** total dependency ratio: 69.9 youth dependency ratio: 64.1 elderly dependency ratio: 5.9
- **Median Age:** 21.2 years
- **Population growth rate:** 2% (2022 est.)
- **Literacy:** 85.6%
- **School life expectancy: (primary to tertiary):** NA
- **Urbanization:** 71.4% of total population (2022)
- **Urbanization Growth Rate:** 2.91% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)
- **GDP per capita:** \$9,300 (2020 est.)
- **GDP Composition:** agriculture: 3.3% (2017 est.) industry: 51% (2017 est.) services: 45.8% (2017 est.)
- **Labor force by Occupation (2004):** agriculture: 21.6% industry: 18.7% services: 59.8% (2008 est.)
- **Overall Unemployment Rate:** 16% (2012 est.)
- **Unemployment Youth ages 15-24:** total: 25.6% male: 22% female: 63.3% (2017)

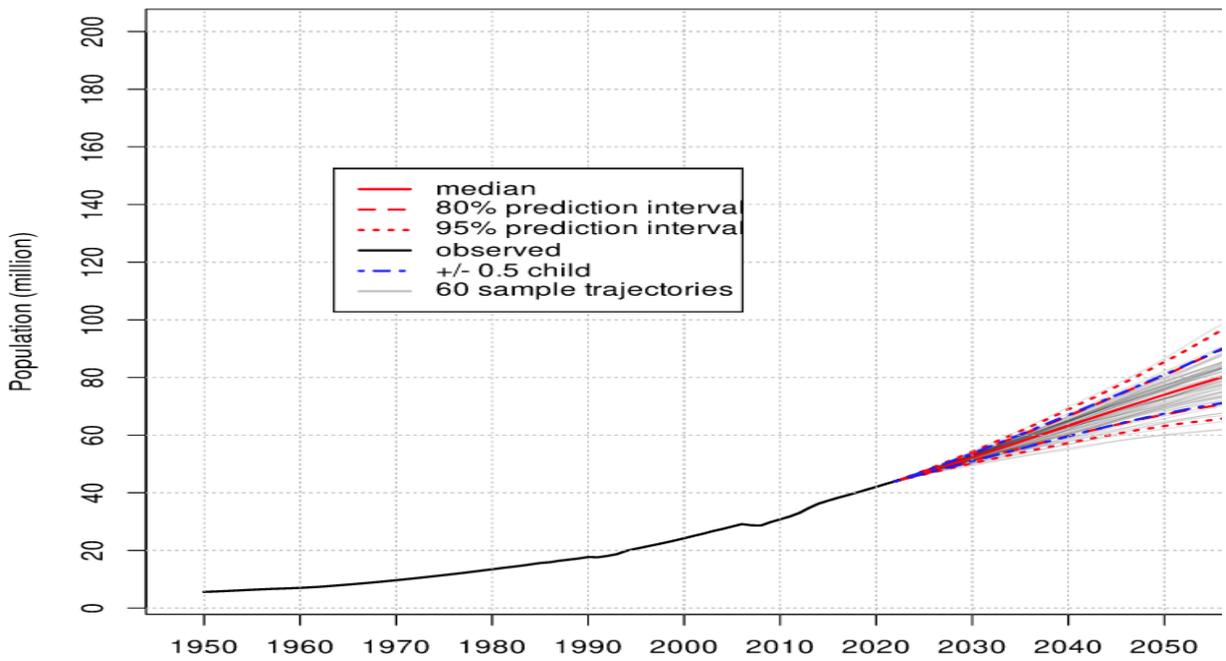
Iraq: Total Population Growth (In Millions)

World Bank



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=IQ>

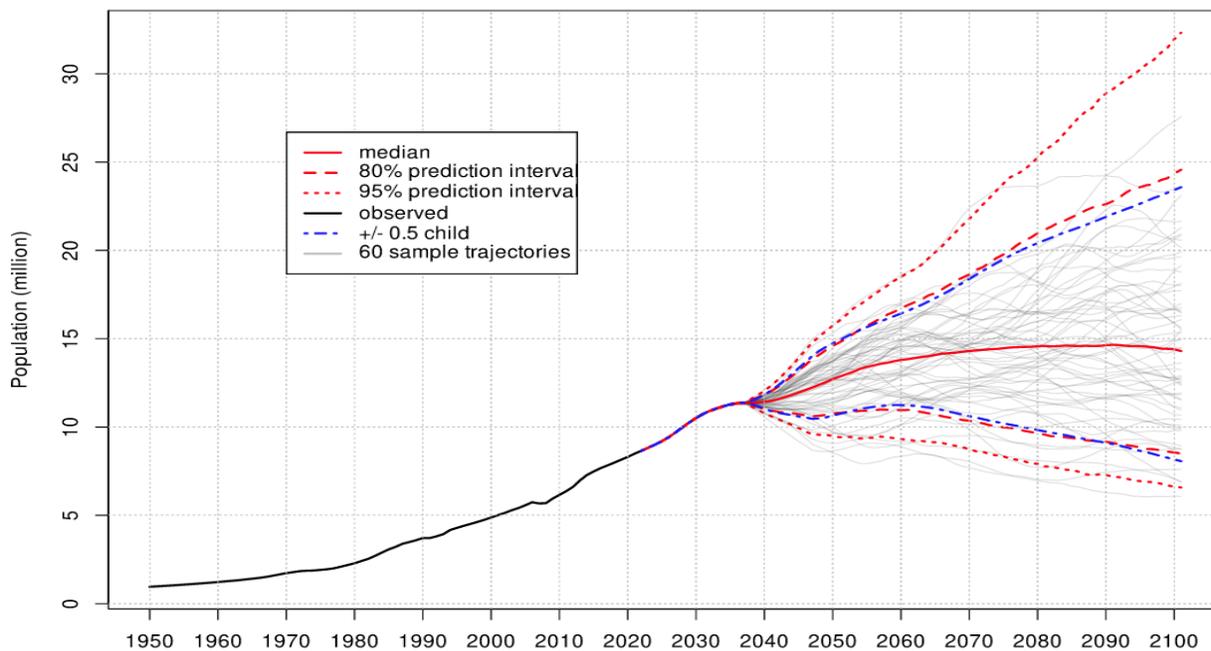
UN: 1950-2050



Source: United Nations, DESA Population Division, edited to limit projections to 2050, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/368>

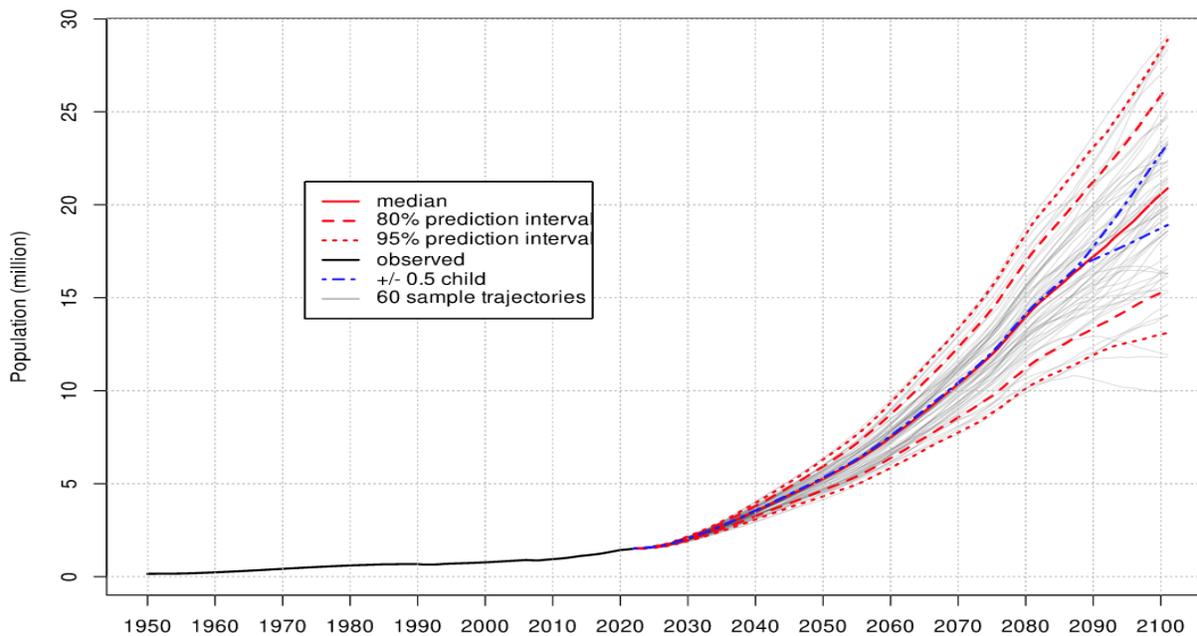
Iraq: Warning Signs: Entry to Labor Force Age and Seniors 65 and Over

UN: Population Age 15-24



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United Nations, DESA, Population Division. *World Population Prospects 2022*. <http://population.un.org/wpp/>

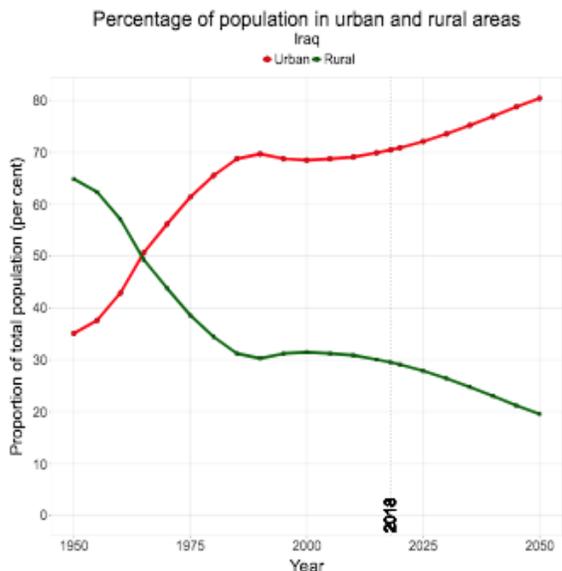
UN: Age 65 and Over



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United Nations, DESA, Population Division. *World Population Prospects 2022*. <http://population.un.org/wpp/>

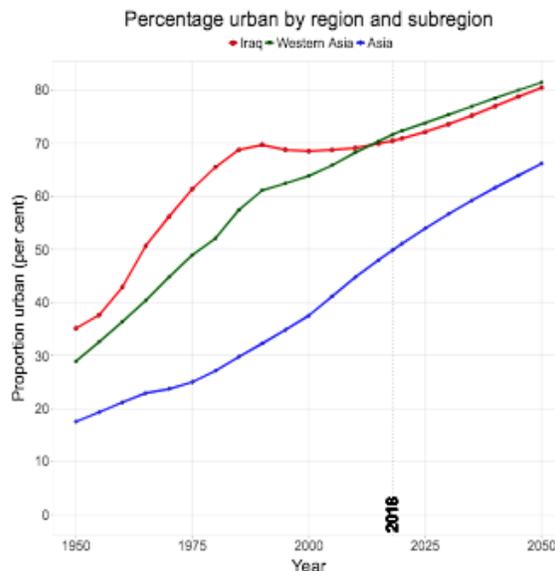
Source: United Nations, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/368>

Iraq: Shifts from Rural to Urban Market-Driven Population



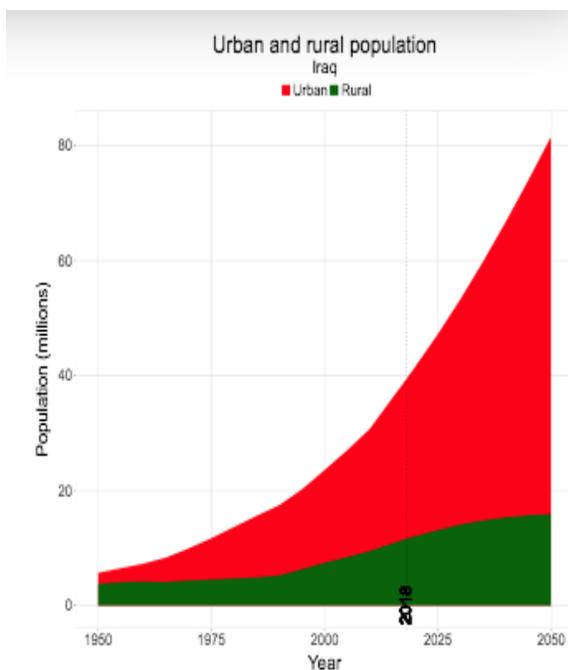
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Note: Urban and rural population in the current country or area as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



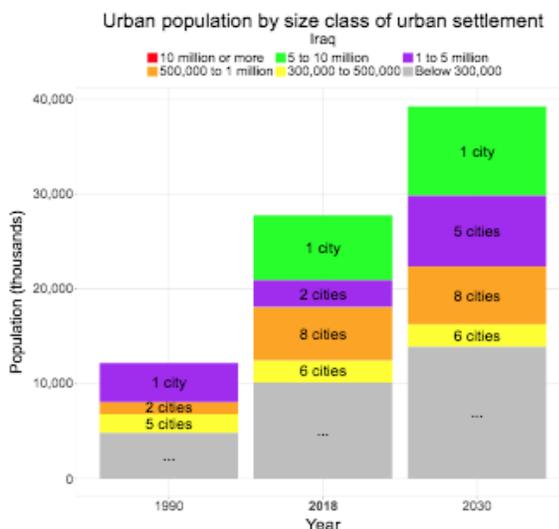
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Note: Proportion of urban population in the current country as compared to its subregion and region. The proportion is expressed as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



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Note: Urban and rural population in the current country.



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Note: Urban population by size class of urban settlement and number of cities, 1990, 2018 and 2030. The grey area is a residual category that includes all urban settlements with a population of less than 300,000 inhabitants.

Oman

Oman is a small country with limited petroleum resources and other progress in economic development other than tourism.

Population pressure is already a critical problem and is projected to grow steadily over time.

There is comparatively high youth pressure for more jobs through at least 2050. The rise in over age 65 is very high and there may be a serious rise in dependency as the population ages.

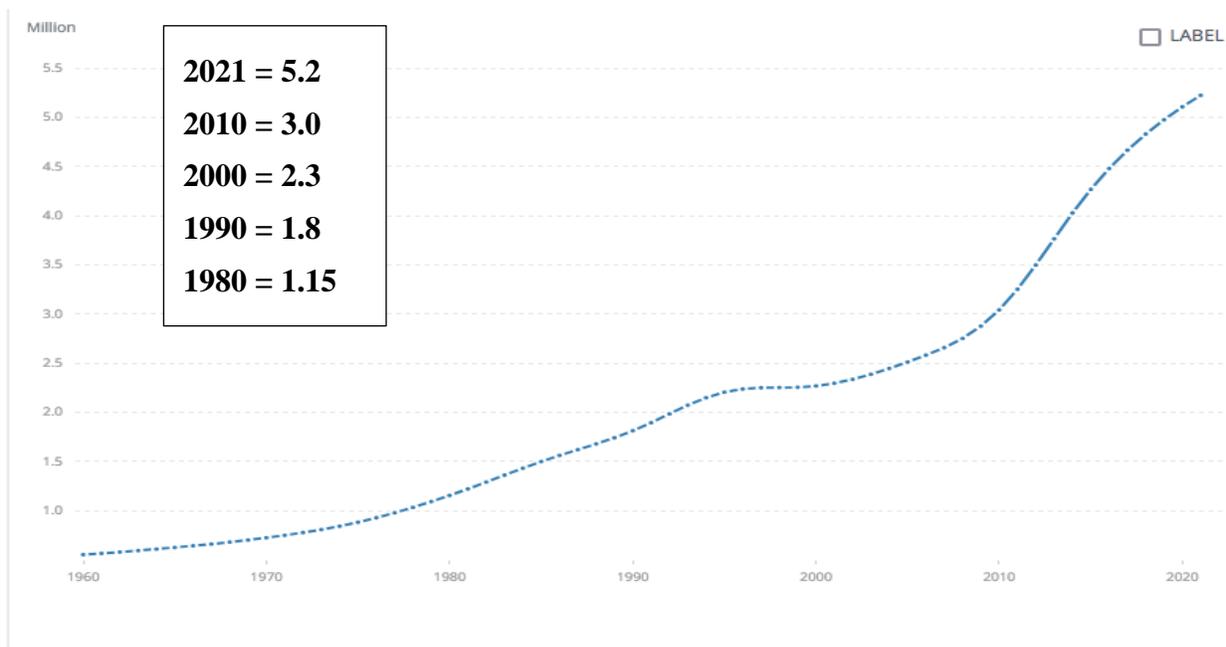
The country is already close to its maximum level of urbanization relative to its comparatively tiny rural areas and agriculture. Climate change and water seem to be growing problems.

Snapshot of Key Factoids from the CIA Factbook (accessed August 2022)

- **Population distribution:** The vast majority of the population is located in and around the Al Hagar Mountains in the north of the country; another smaller cluster is found around the city of Salalah in the far south; most of the country remains sparsely populated
- **Foreign population:** Immigrants make up approximately 46% of the total population (2019)
- **Ethnic groups:** Arab, Baluchi, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi), African
- **Sectarian groups:** Muslim 85.9%, Christian 6.4%, Hindu 5.7%, other and unaffiliated 2% (2020 est.)
- **Dependency ratios:** total dependency ratio: 33.3 youth dependency ratio: 30 elderly dependency ratio: 3.3
- **Median Age:** 26.2 years
- **Population growth rate:** 1.84% (2022 est.)
- **Literacy:** 95.7%
- **School life expectancy: (primary to tertiary):** 15 years
- **Urbanization:** 87.8% of total population (2022)
- **Urbanization Growth Rate:** 2.32% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)
- **GDP per capita:** \$27,300 (2019 est.) note: data are in 2017 dollars
- **GDP Composition:** agriculture: 1.8% (2017 est.) industry: 46.4% (2017 est.) services: 51.8% (2017 est.)
- **Labor force by Occupation (2004):** agriculture: 4.7% industry: 49.6% services: 45% (2016 est.)
- **Overall Unemployment Rate:** NA
- **Unemployment Youth ages 15-24:** total: 13.7% male: 10.3% female: 33.9% (2016)

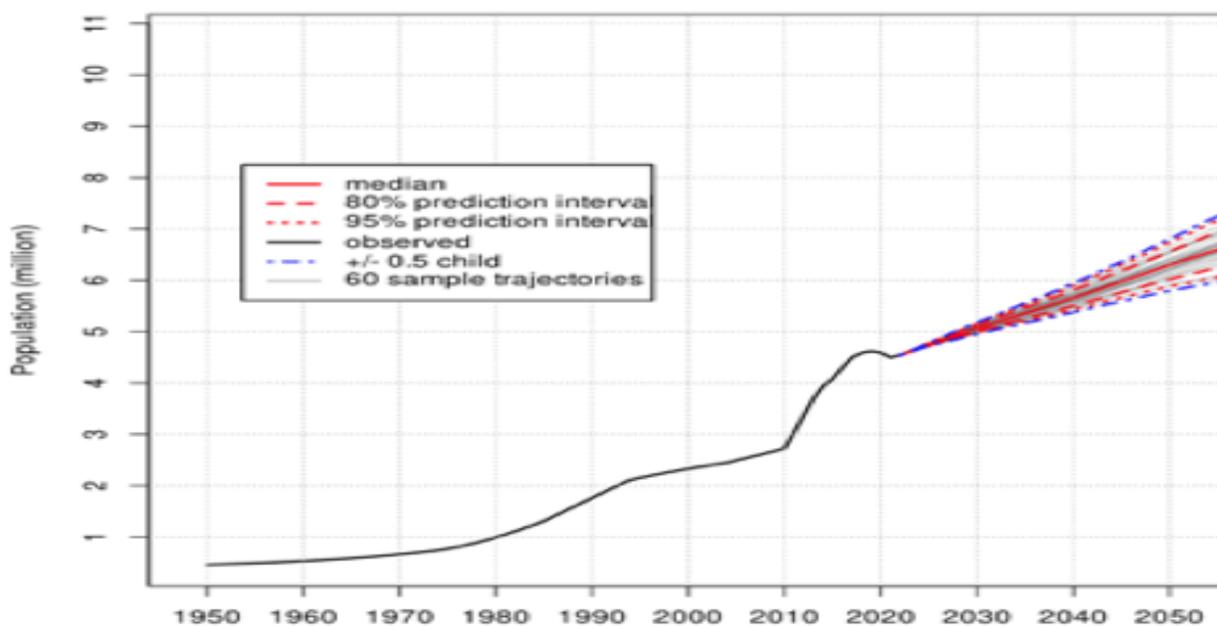
Oman: Total Population Growth Estimates (In Millions)

World Bank: 1960-2021



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=QA>

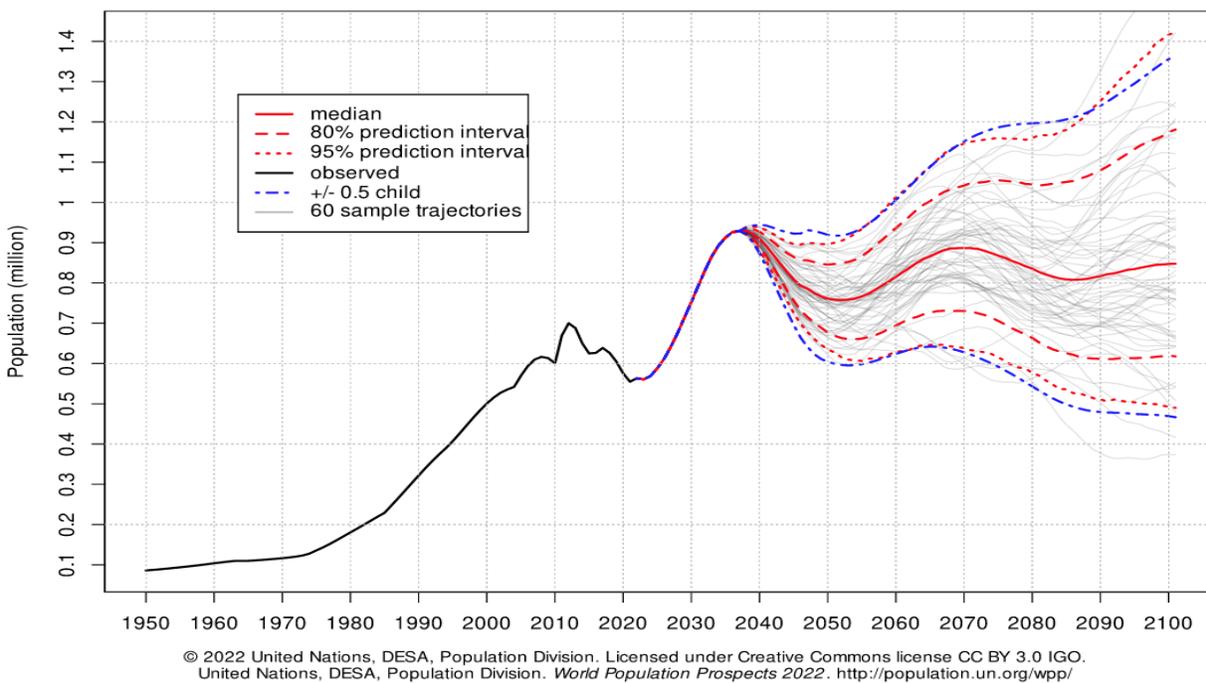
UN: 1950-2050



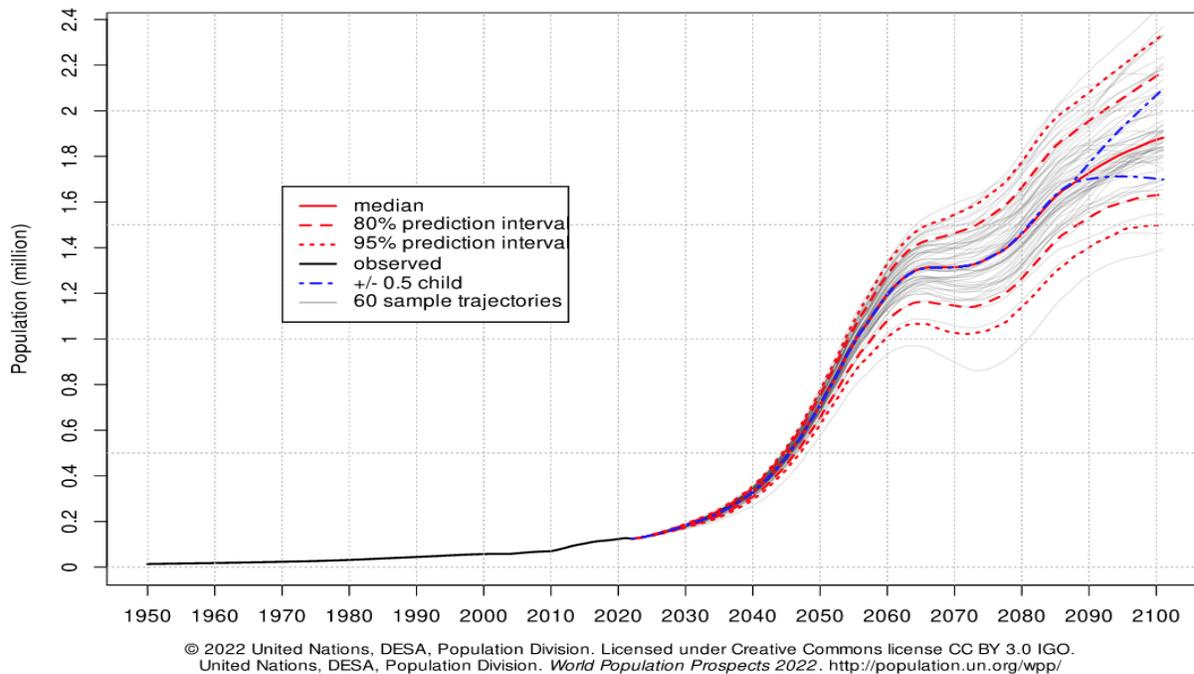
Source: United Nations, DESA Population Division, edited to limit projections to 2050, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/512>

Oman: Warning Signs: Entry to Labor Force Age and Seniors 65 and Over

UN: Population Age 15-24

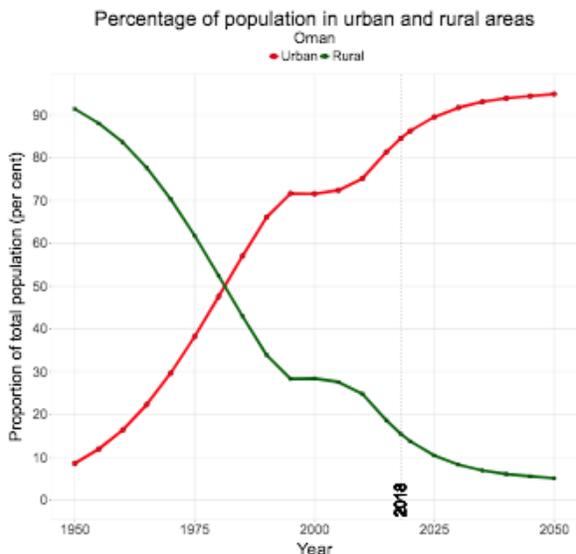


UN: Age 65 and Over



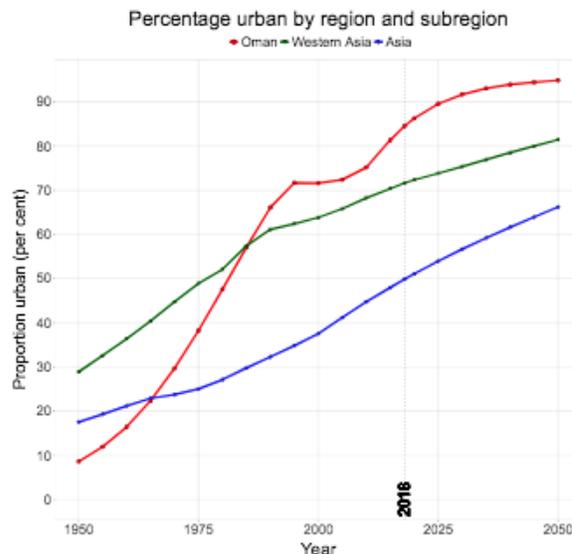
Source: United Nations, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/512>

Oman: Shifts from Rural to Urban Market-Driven Population



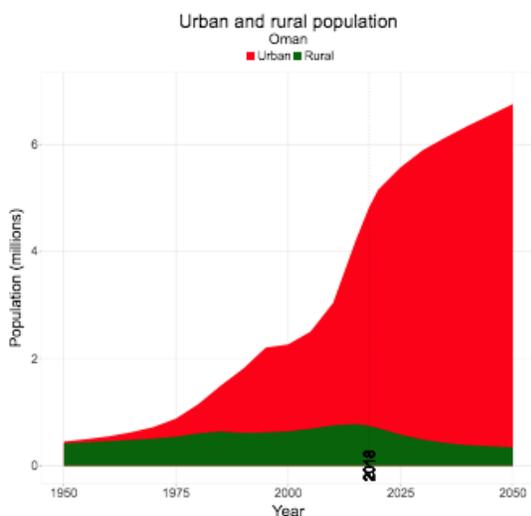
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Note: Urban and rural population in the current country or area as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



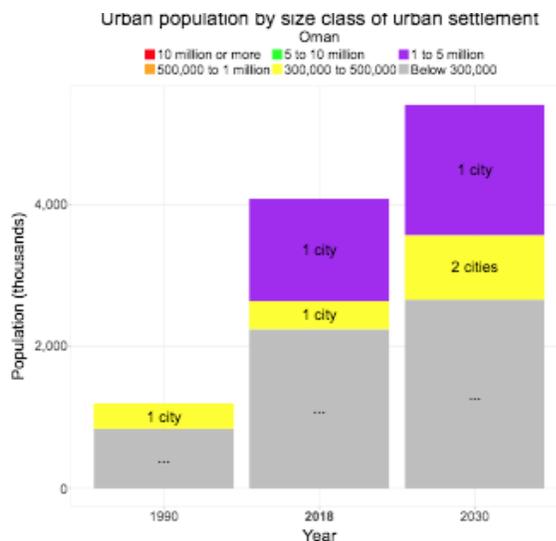
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Note: Proportion of urban population in the current country as compared to its subregion and region. The proportion is expressed as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



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Note: Urban and rural population in the current country.



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Note: Urban population by size class of urban settlement and number of cities, 1990, 2018 and 2030. The grey area is a residual category that includes all urban settlements with a population of less than 300,000 inhabitants.

Qatar

Qatar is a small country with vast natural gas resources. It has used its growing income to fund and develop a modern service economy centered around petroleum exports while investing in a major fund for the future.

Population increases are projected to drop over time, but to remain relatively high through 2050, Qatar seems to have the petroleum wealth, and progress in development, to absorb this increase effectively.

There is moderate to high youth pressure for more jobs indefinitely into the future. The rise in over age 65 is a high through 2060 and there will be a serious rise in dependency as the population ages – although one Qatar may well be able to afford.

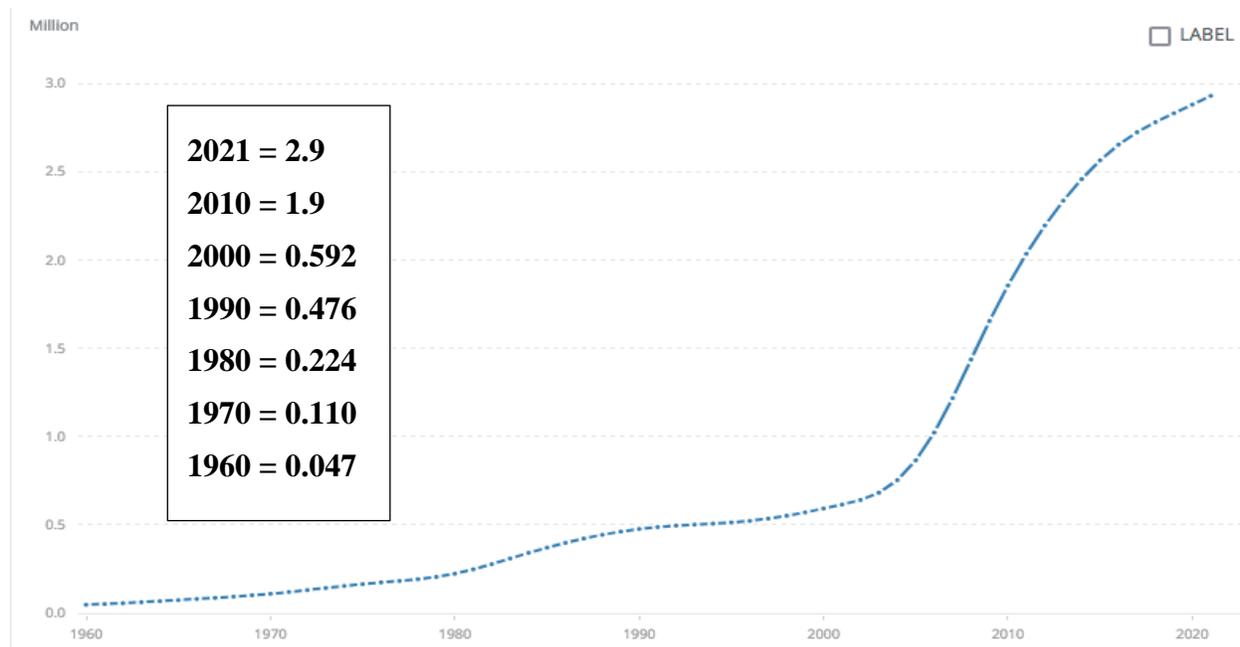
The country is already close to its maximum level of urbanization relative to its comparatively tiny rural areas and agricultural output.

Snapshot of Key Factoids from the CIA Factbook (accessed August 2022)

- **Population distribution:** most of the population is clustered in or around the capital of Doha on the eastern side of the peninsula
- **Foreign population:** NA
- **Ethnic groups:** non-Qatari 88.4%, Qatari 11.6% (2015 est.)
- **Sectarian groups:** Muslim 65.2%, Christian 13.7%, Hindu 15.9%, Buddhist 3.8%, folk religion <0.1%, Jewish <0.1%, other <1%, unaffiliated <1% (2020 est.)
- **Dependency ratios:** total dependency ratio: 18.1 youth dependency ratio: 16.1 elderly dependency ratio: 2
- **Median Age:** 33.7 years
- **Population growth rate:** 1.04% (2022 est.)
- **Literacy:** 93.5%
- **School life expectancy: (primary to tertiary):** 13 years
- **Urbanization:** 99.3% of total population (2022)
- **Urbanization Growth Rate:** 1.66% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)
- **GDP per capita:** \$85,300 (2020 est.)
- **GDP Composition:** agriculture: 0.2% (2017 est.) industry: 50.3% (2017 est.) services: 49.5% (2017 est.)
- **Labor force by Occupation (2004):** NA
- **Overall Unemployment Rate:** 8.9% (2017 est.)
- **Unemployment Youth ages 15-24:** total: 0.4% male: 0.2% female: 1.5% (2018 est.)

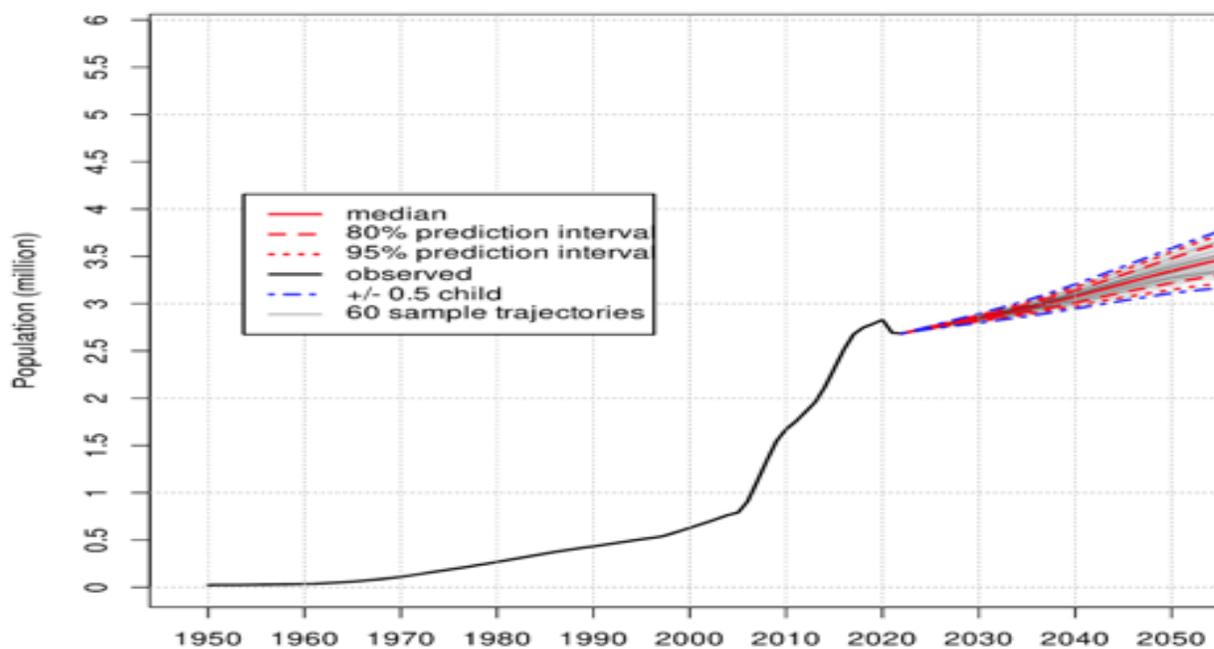
Qatar: Total Population Growth (In Millions)

World Bank



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=QA>

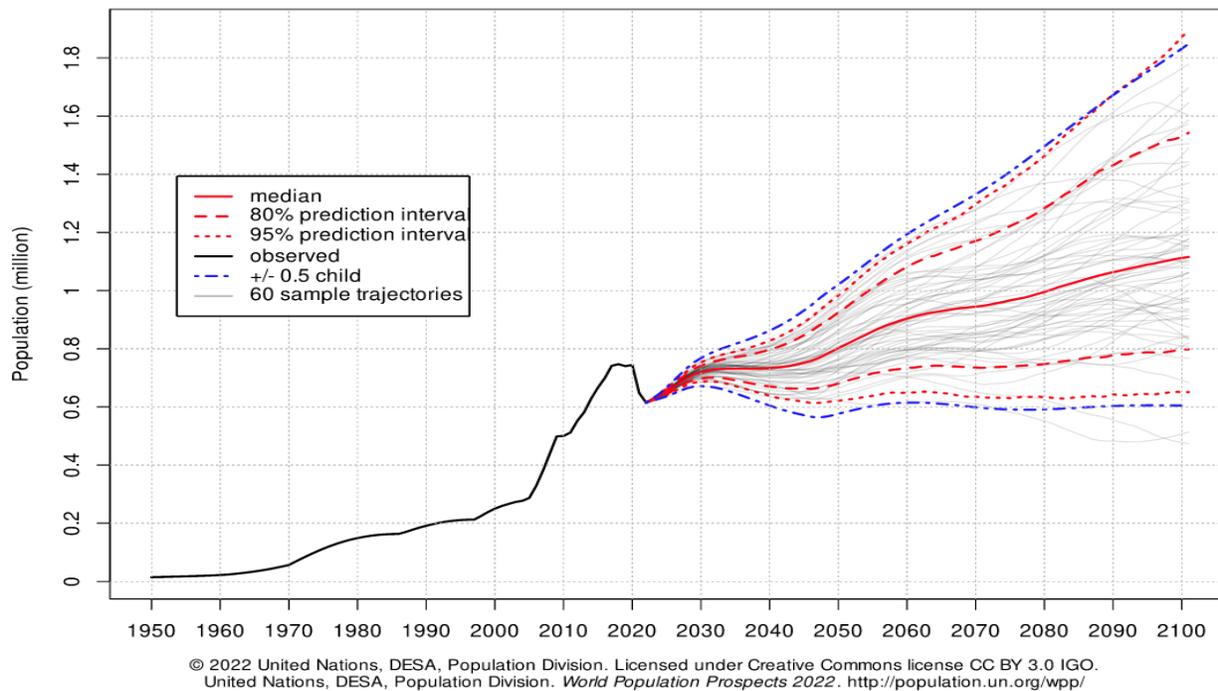
UN: 1950-2050



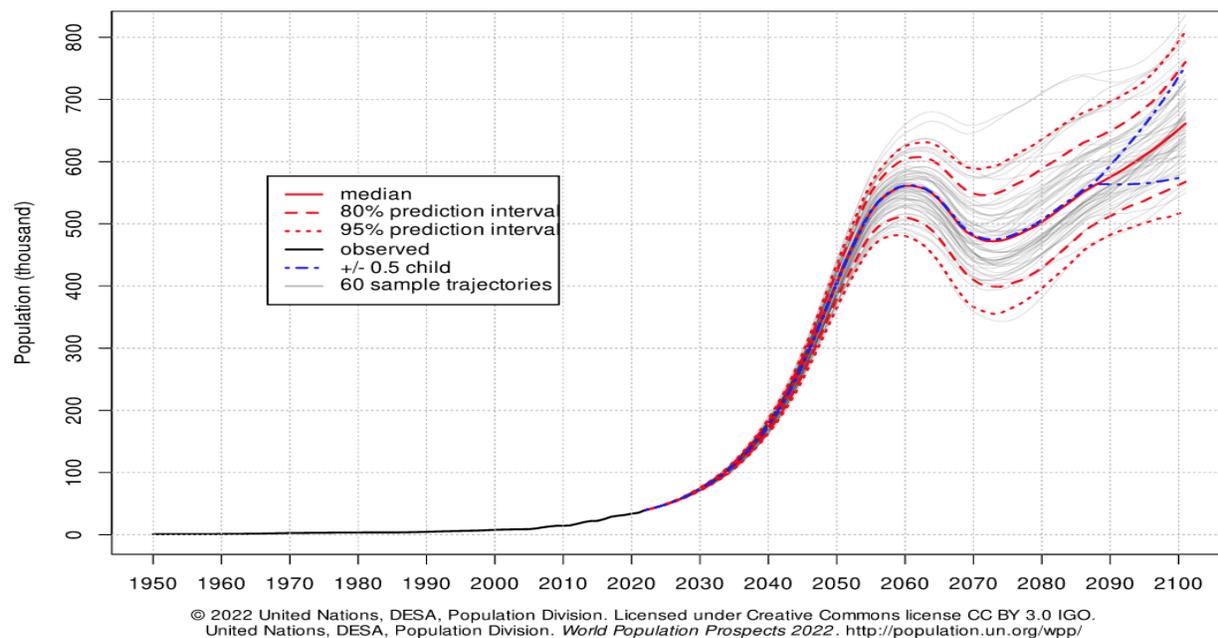
Source: United Nations, DESA Population Division, edited to limit projections to 2050, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/634>

Qatar: Warning Signs: Entry to Labor Force Age and Seniors 65 and Over

UN: Population Age 15-24

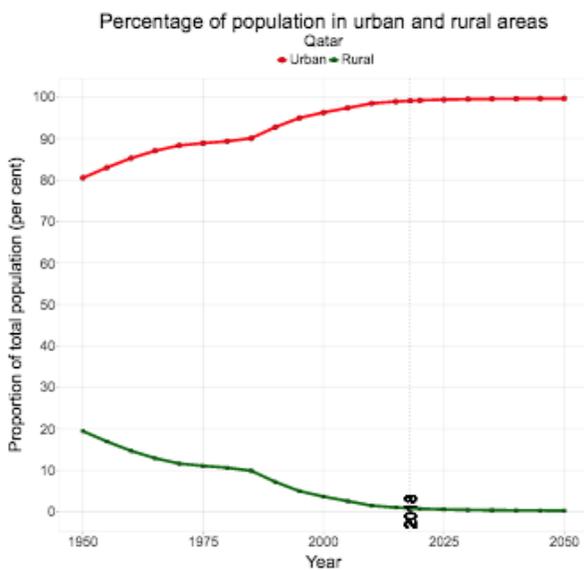


UN: Age 65 and Over

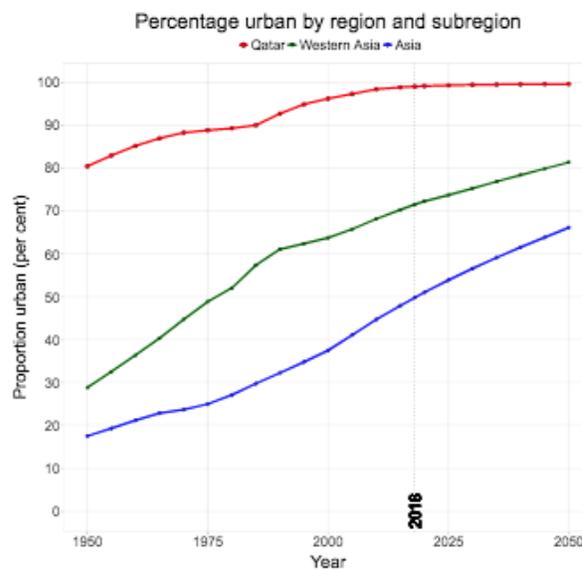
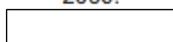


Source: United Nations, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/65plus/634>

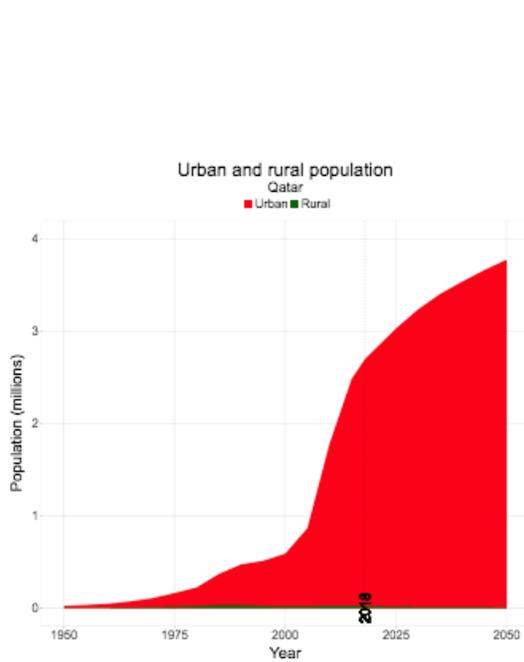
Qatar: Shifts from Rural to Urban Market-Driven Population



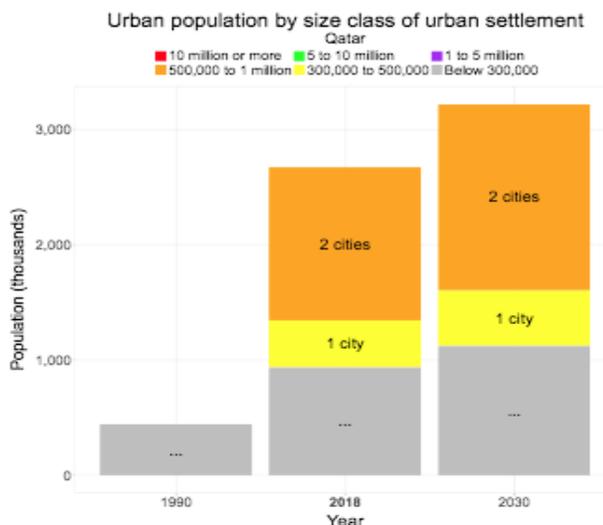
Note: Urban and rural population in the current country and area as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



Note: Proportion of urban population in the current country as compared to its subregion and region. The proportion is expressed as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



Note: Urban and rural population in the current country.



Note: Urban population by size class of urban settlement and number of cities, 1990, 2018 and 2030. The grey area is a residual category that includes all urban settlements with a population of less than 300,000 inhabitants.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a major Gulf petroleum power that has used in export revenues relatively well over time. It has an extremely ambitious 2030 development plan which have a number of showpiece projects with dubious cost-benefits. It does, however, seem to have the wealth and overall progress in development to cope.

Population increases are projected to remain relatively high through 2050 and will present a growing burden on its economy.

There is comparatively high youth pressure for more jobs projected through 2050. The rise in over age 65 is projected to be very high, but Saudi Arabia may well be able to afford it.

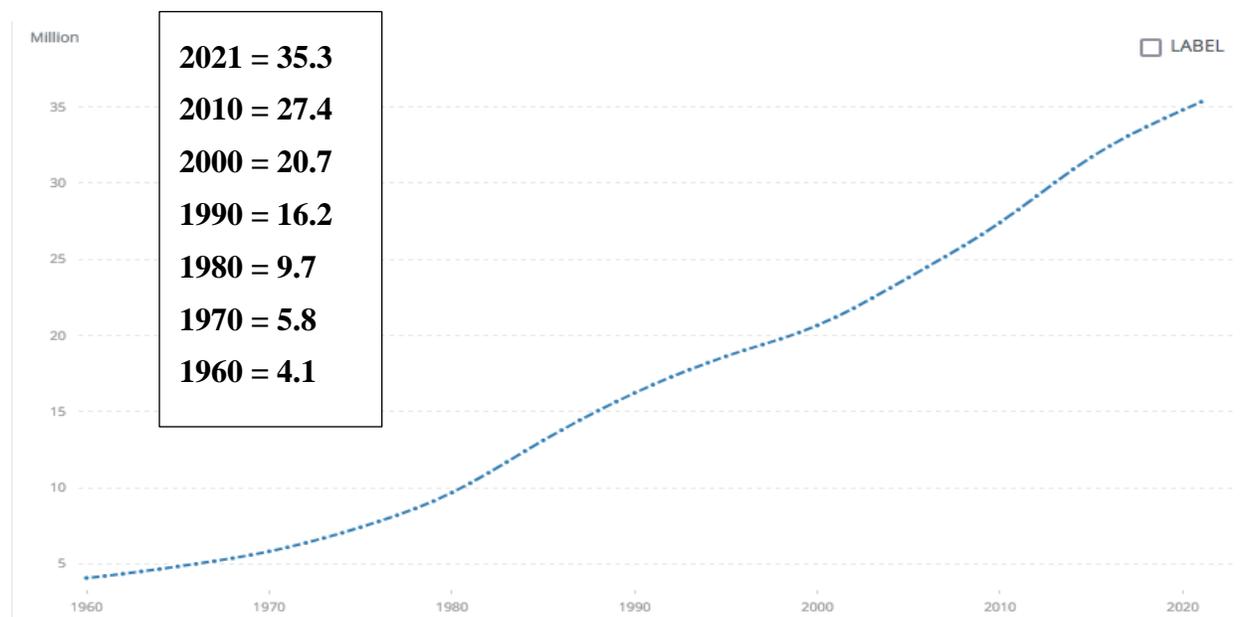
The country is already close to its maximum level of urbanization relative to its comparatively limited rural areas and the agricultural output it can sustain without artificial subsidies and increases in expensive desalination.

Snapshot of Key Factoids from the CIA Factbook (accessed August 2022)

- **Population distribution:** historically a population that was mostly nomadic or semi-nomadic, the Saudi population has become more settled since petroleum was discovered in the 1930s; most of the economic activities - and with it the country's population - is concentrated in a wide area across the middle of the peninsula, from Ad Dammam in the east, through Riyadh in the interior, to Mecca-Medina in the west near the Red Sea
- **Foreign population:** immigrants make up 38.3% of the total population, according to UN data (2019)
- **Ethnic groups:** Arab 90%, Afro-Asian 10%
- **Sectarian groups:** Muslim (official; citizens are 85-90% Sunni and 10-12% Shia), other (includes Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh) (2020 est.)
- **Dependency ratios:** total dependency ratio: 39.3 youth dependency ratio: 34.4 elderly dependency ratio: 4.9
- **Median Age:** 30.8 years
- **Population growth rate:** 1.63% (2022 est.)
- **Literacy:** 97.6%
- **School life expectancy: (primary to tertiary):** 16 years
- **Urbanization:** 84.7% of total population (2022)
- **Urbanization Growth Rate:** 1.69% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)
- **GDP per capita:** \$44,300 (2020 est.)
- **GDP Composition:** agriculture: 2.6% (2017 est.) industry: 44.2% (2017 est.) services: 53.2% (2017 est.)
- **Labor force by Occupation (2004):** agriculture: 6.7% industry: 21.4% services: 71.9% (2005 est.)
- **Overall Unemployment Rate:** 6% (2017 est.)
- **Unemployment Youth ages 15-24:** total: 27.2% male: 21.5% female: 43.8% (2020 est.)

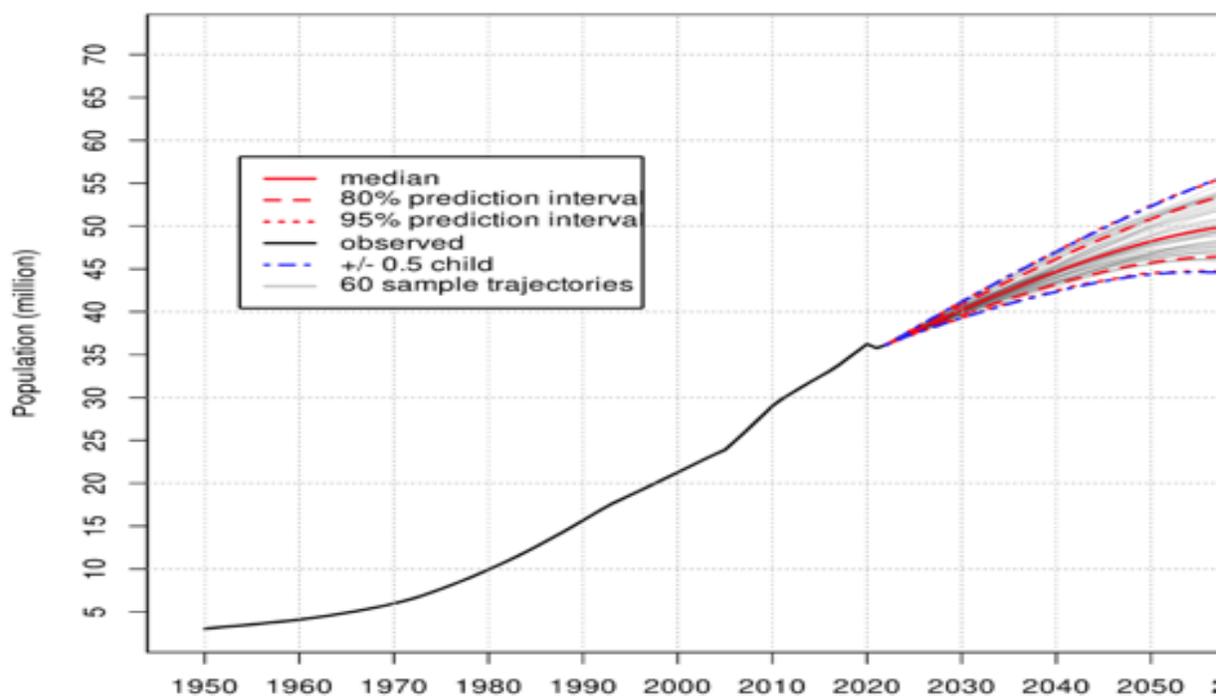
Saudi Arabia: Total Population Growth (In Millions)

World Bank



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=YE>

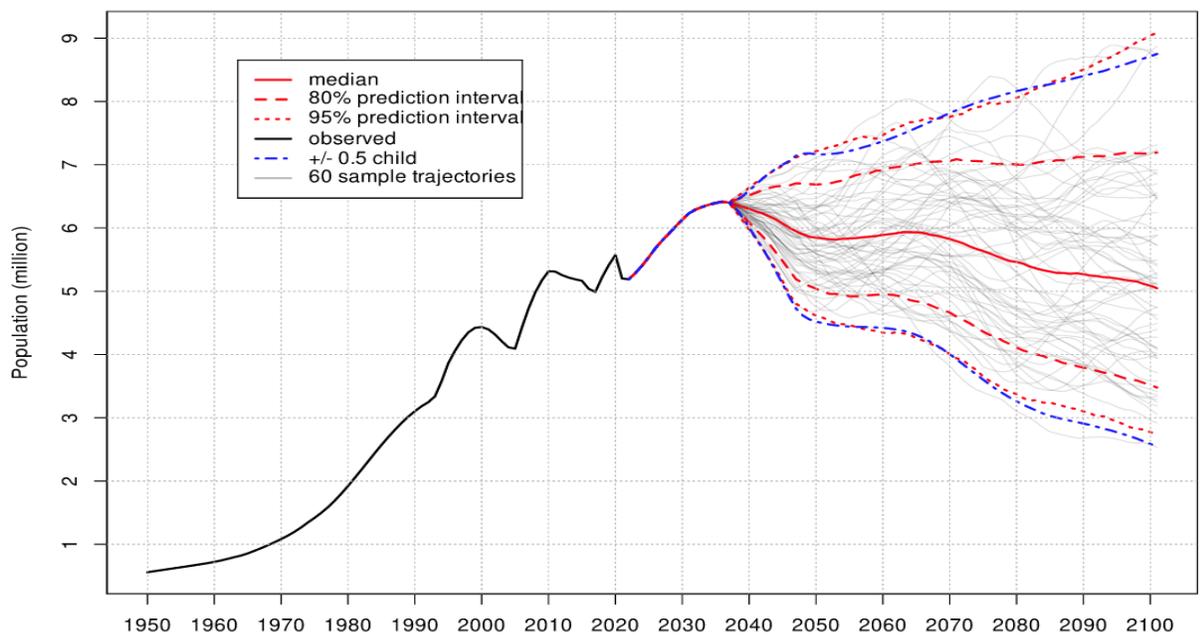
UN: 1950-2050



Source: United Nations, DESA Population Division, edited to limit projections to 2050, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/682>

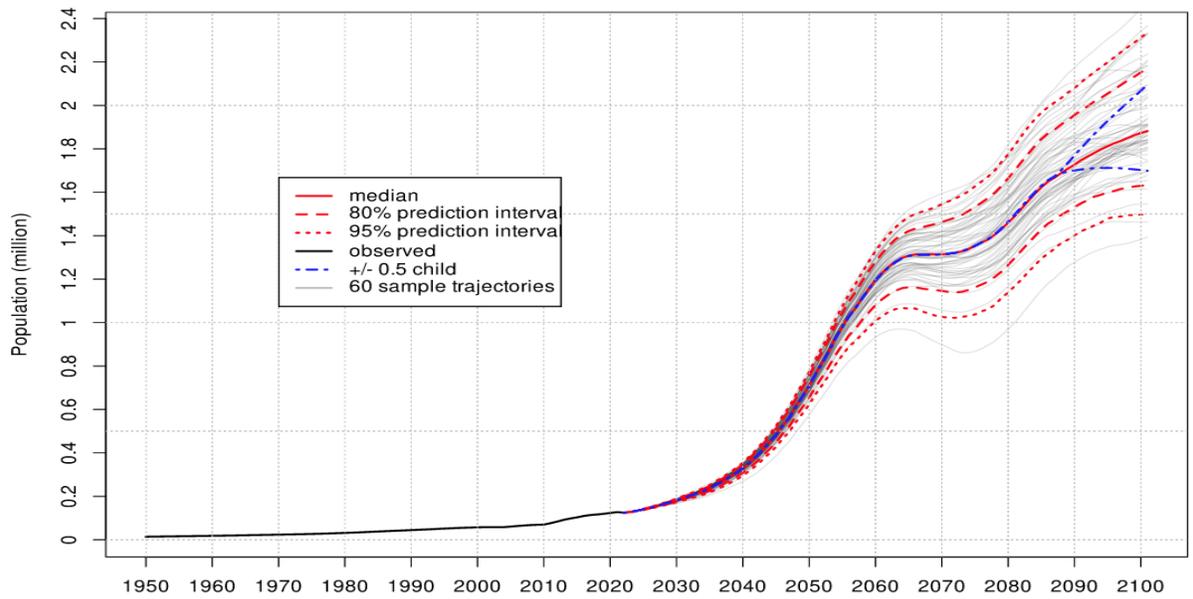
Saudi Arabia: Warning Signs: Entry to Labor Force Age and Seniors 65 and Over

UN: Population Age 15-24



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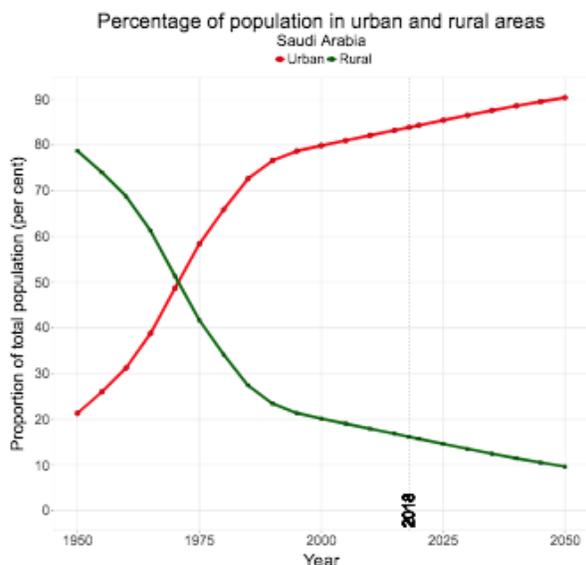
UN: Age 65 and Over



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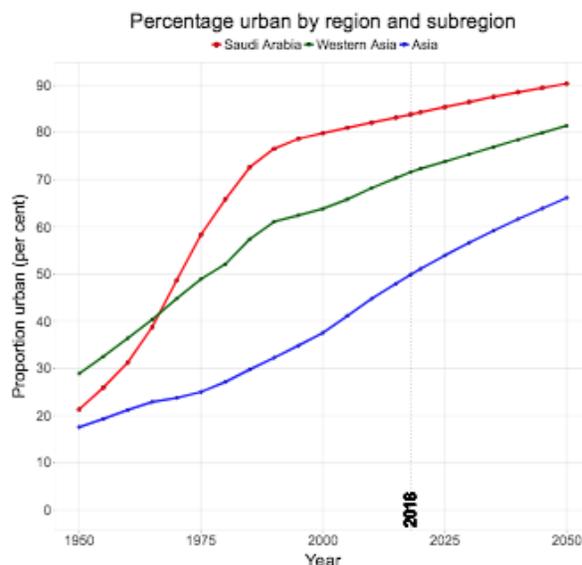
Source: United Nations, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/682>

Saudi Arabia: Shifts from Rural to Urban Market-Driven Population



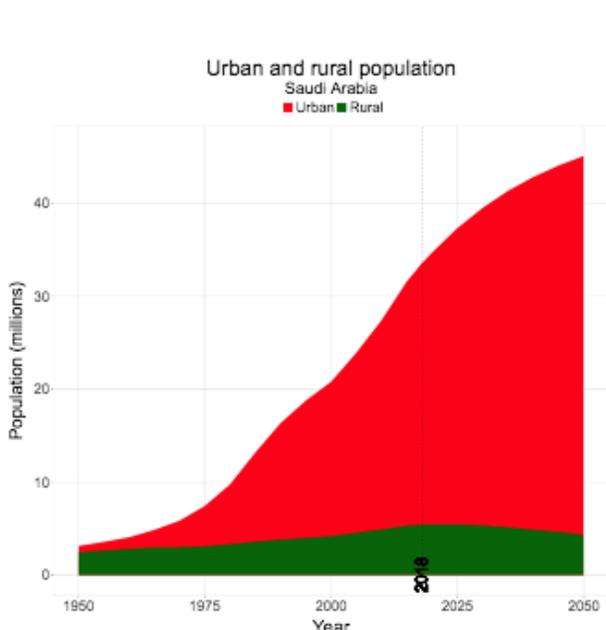
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Note: Urban and rural population in the current country or area as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



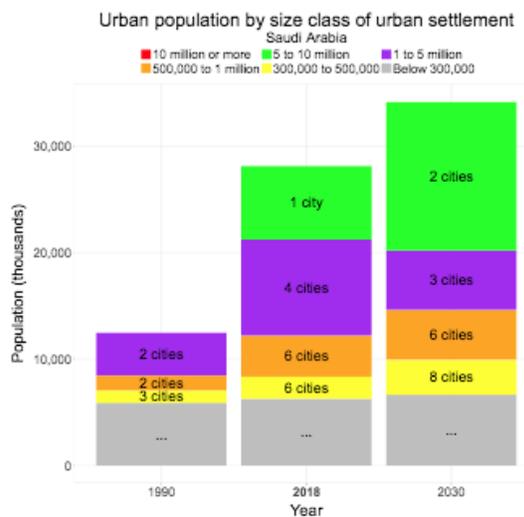
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Note: Proportion of urban population in the current country as compared to its subregion and region. The proportion is expressed as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



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Note: Urban and rural population in the current country.



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Note: Urban population by size class of urban settlement and number of cities, 1990, 2018 and 2030. The grey area is a residual category that includes all urban settlements with a population of less than 300,000 inhabitants.

UAE

The UAE is a medium sized Gulf country composed of separate emirates. It is a major petroleum exporter and has used this income to develop a modern service economy centered around petroleum exports and tourism while investing a major fund for the future.

Population increases are projected to remain relatively high through 2100. Their future affordability will depend on the future demand for petroleum in an era of climate change.

There is comparatively high youth pressure for more jobs through 2040. The rise in over age 65 is higher and will require a significant rise in funding as the population ages.

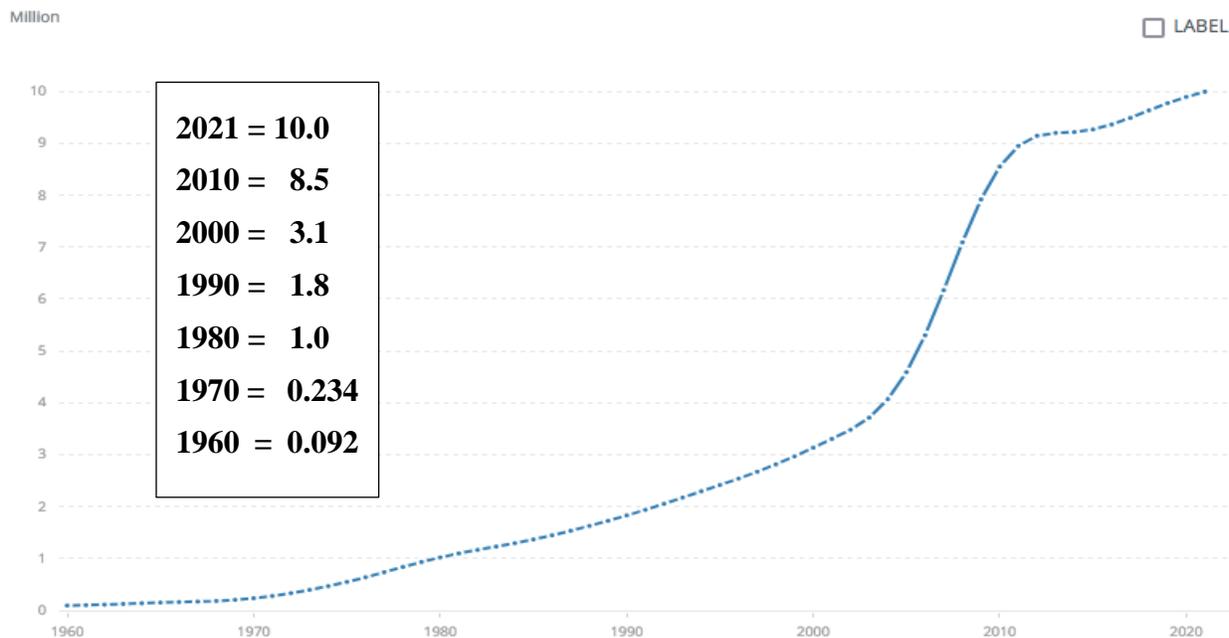
The country is already close to its maximum level of urbanization relative to its comparatively limited rural areas and the agricultural output it can sustain without artificial subsidies and increases in expensive desalination.

Snapshot of Key Factoids from the CIA Factbook (accessed August 2022)

- **Population distribution:** population is heavily concentrated to the northeast on the Musandam Peninsula; the three largest emirates - Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah - are home to nearly 85% of the population
- **Foreign population:** as of 2019, immigrants make up about 87.9% of the total population, according to UN data
- **Ethnic groups:** Emirati 11.6%, South Asian 59.4% (includes Indian 38.2%, Bangladeshi 9.5%, Pakistani 9.4%, other 2.3%), Egyptian 10.2%, Filipino 6.1%, other 12.8% (2015 est.)
- **Sectarian groups:** Muslim (official) 76%, Christian 9%, other (primarily Hindu and Buddhist, less than 5% of the population consists of Parsi, Baha'i, Druze, Sikh, Ahmadi, Ismaili, Dawoodi Bohra Muslim, and Jewish) 15% (2005 est.)
- **Dependency ratios:** total dependency ratio: 19.2 youth dependency ratio: 17.7 elderly dependency ratio: 1.5
- **Median Age:** 38.4 years
- **Population growth rate:** 0.58% (2022 est.)
- **Literacy:** %
- **School life expectancy: (primary to tertiary):** years
- **Urbanization:** 87.5% of total population
- **Urbanization Growth Rate:** 1.5% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)
- **GDP per capita:** \$67,100 (2019 est.)
- **GDP Composition:** agriculture: 0.9% (2017 est.) industry: 49.8% (2017 est.) services: 49.2% (2017 est.)
- **Labor force by Occupation (2004):** agriculture: 7% industry: 15% services: 78% (2000 est.)
- **Overall Unemployment Rate:** 1.6% (2016 est.)
- **Unemployment Youth ages 15-24:** total: 7.2% male: 4.9% female: 15% (2019 est.)

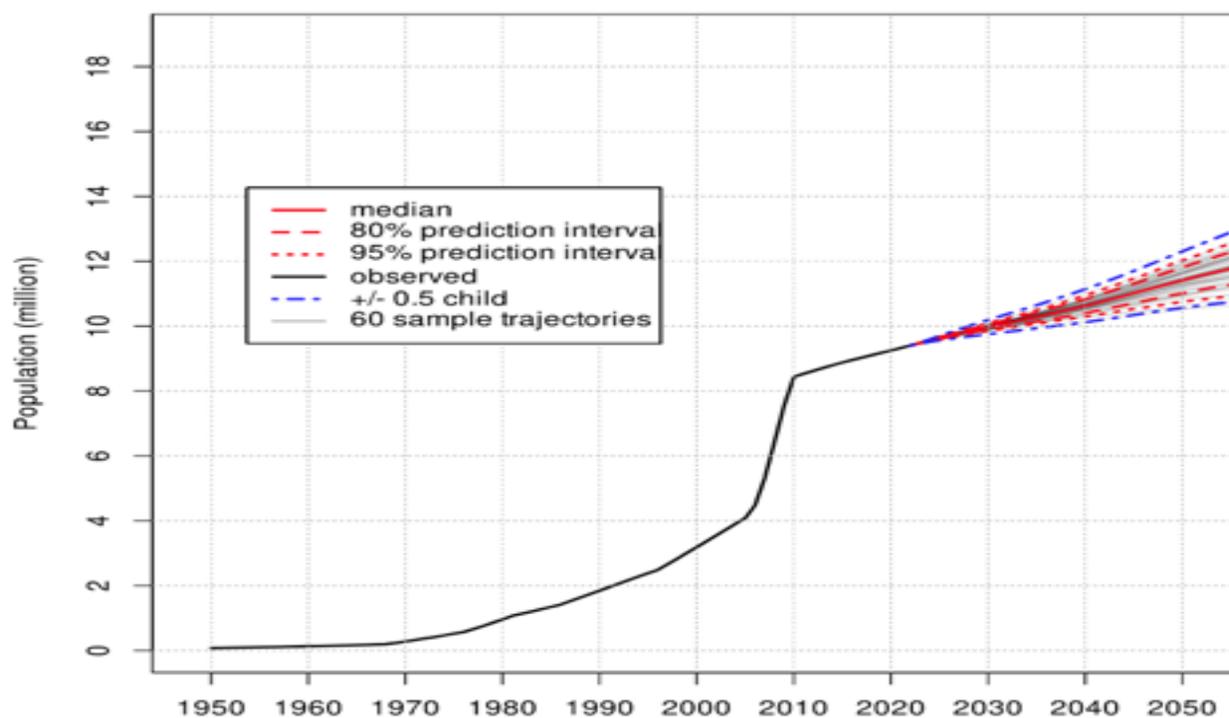
UAE: Total Population Growth (Millions)

World Bank



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=YE>

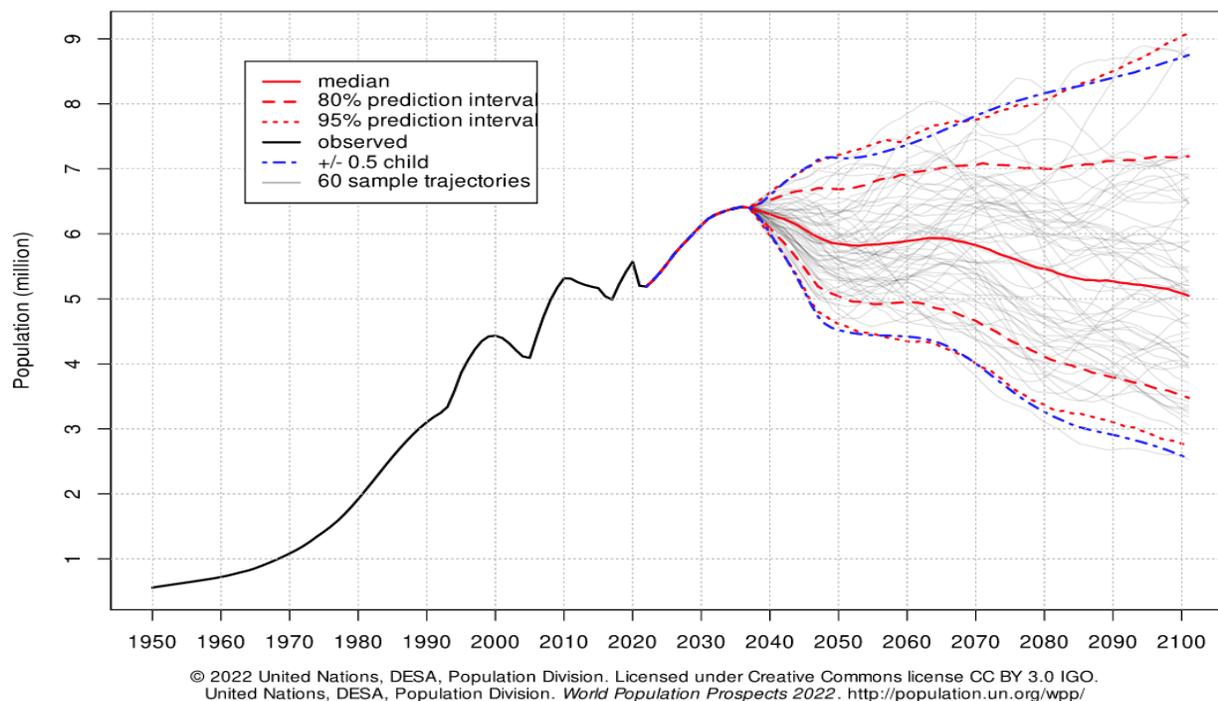
UN: 1950-2050



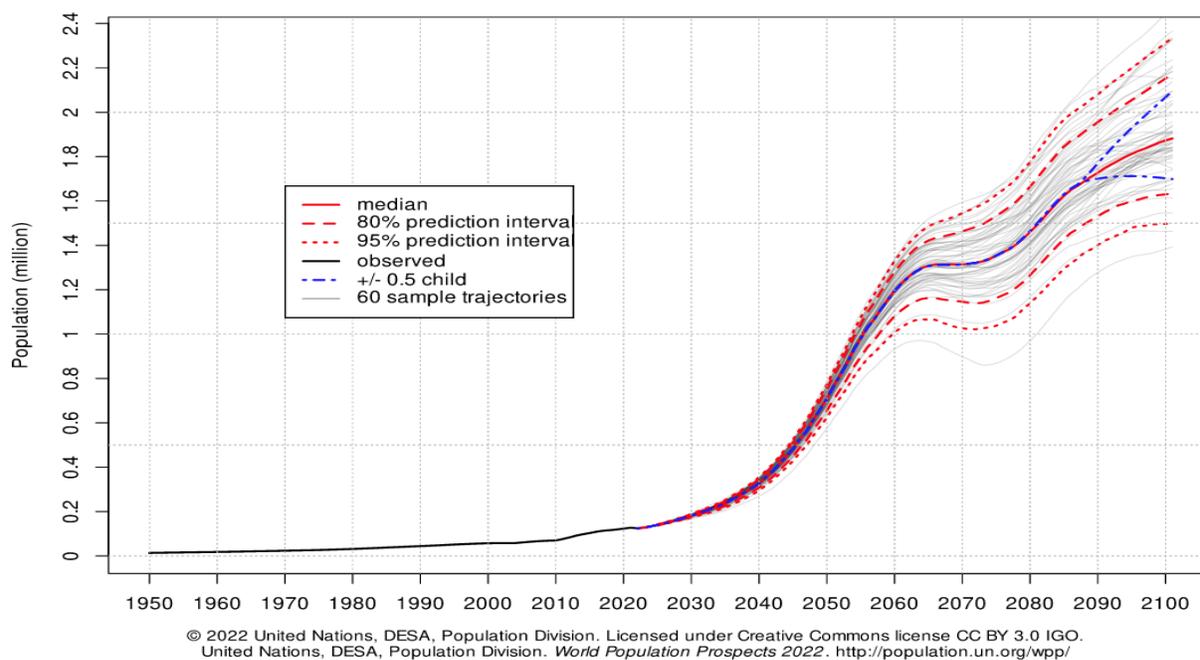
Source: United Nations, DESA Population Division, edited to limit projections to 2050, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/784>

UAE: Warning Signs: Entry to Labor Force Age and Seniors 65 and Over

UN: Population Age 15-24

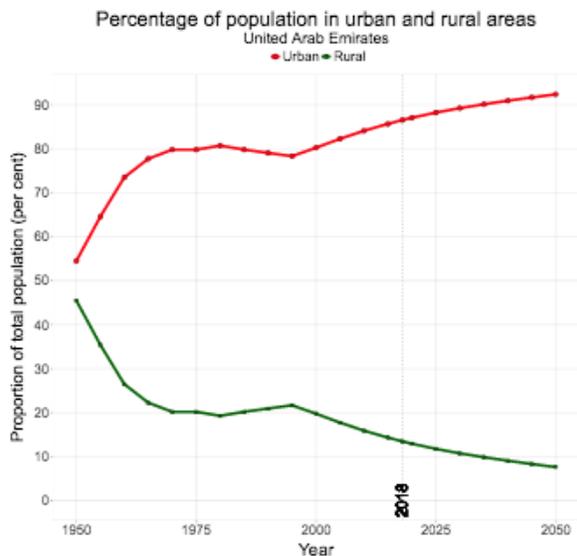


UN: Age 65 and Over



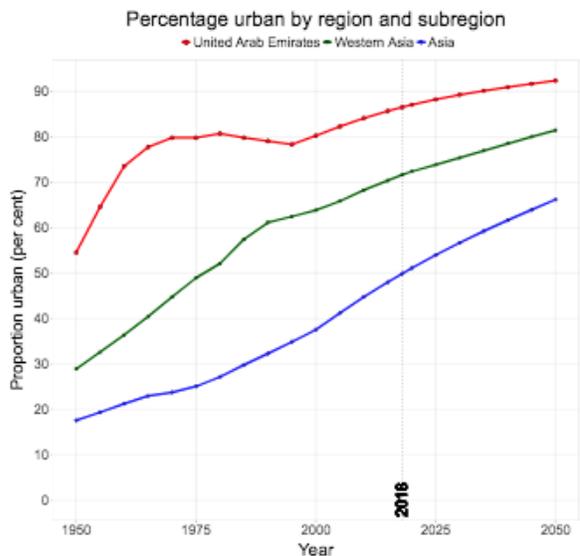
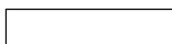
Source: United Nations, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/784>

UAE: Shifts from Rural to Urban Market-Driven Population



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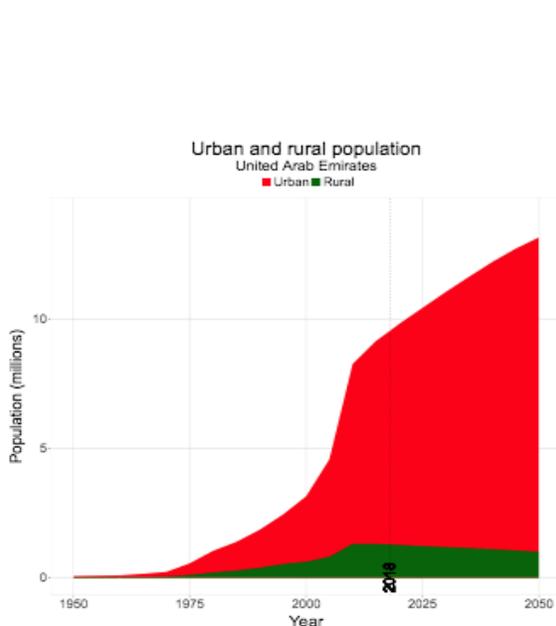
Note: Urban and rural population in the current country or area as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



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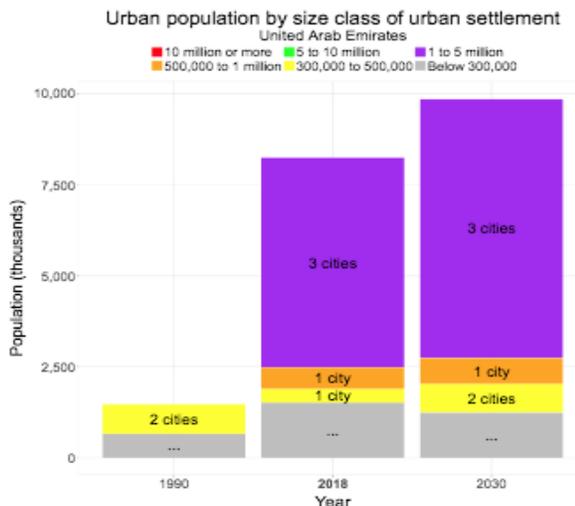
Note: Proportion of urban population in the current country as compared to its subregion and region. The proportion is expressed as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.

Data file



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Note: Urban and rural population in the current country.



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Note: Urban population by size class of urban settlement and number of cities, 1990, 2018 and 2030. The grey area is a residual category that includes all urban settlements with a population of less than 300,000 inhabitants.

Yemen

Yemen is an unstable nightmare of warring factions, and one of the poorest countries in the world. It only has comparatively limited petroleum resources and exports, and civil war has already crippled its development.

Population increases are projected to be limited in the future, but already have burdened the country with what may be untenable levels of growth.

Comparatively moderate increases in youth pressure for more jobs is projected, but employment and income problems are already critical. The rise in over age 65 is projected to reach unaffordable levels of dependency as the population ages.

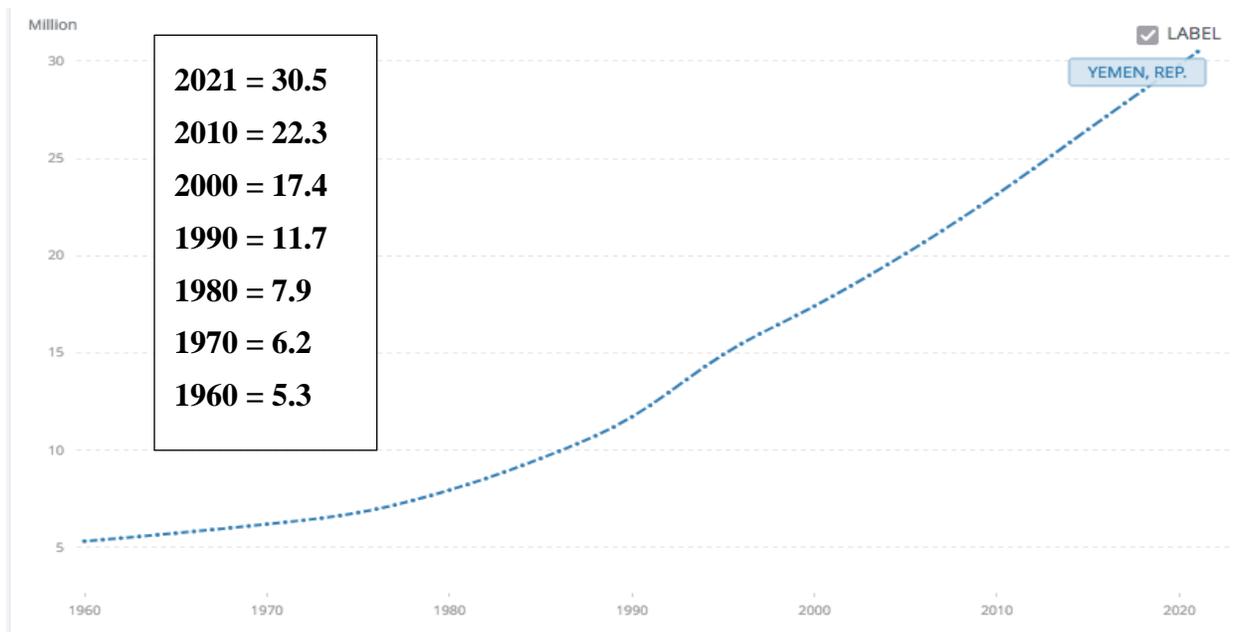
The country is already close to its maximum level of urbanization relative to its comparatively rural areas and agriculture.

Snapshot of Key Factoids from the CIA Factbook (accessed August 2022)

- **Population distribution:** The vast majority of the population is found in the Asir Mountains (part of the larger Sarawat Mountain system), located in the far western region of the country
- **Foreign population:** NA
- **Ethnic groups:** predominantly Arab; but also Afro-Arab, South Asian, European
- **Sectarian groups:** Muslim 99.1% (official; virtually all are citizens, an estimated 65% are Sunni and 35% are Shia), other 0.9% (includes Jewish, Baha'i, Hindu, and Christian; many are refugees or temporary foreign residents) (2020 est.)
- **Dependency ratios:** total dependency ratio: 71.7 youth dependency ratio: 66.7 elderly dependency ratio: 5
- **Median Age:** 19.8 years (2018 est.)
- **Population growth rate:** 1.88% (2022 est.)
- **Literacy:** 70.1%
- **School life expectancy: (primary to tertiary):** 9 years
- **Urbanization:** 39.2% of total population (2022)
- **Urbanization Growth Rate:** 3.71% annual rate of change (2015-20 est.)
- **GDP per capita:** \$2,500 (2017 est.)
- **GDP Composition:** agriculture: 20.3% (2017 est.) industry: 11.8% (2017 est.) services: 67.9% (2017 est.)
- **Labor force by Occupation (2004):** most people are employed in agriculture and herding; services, construction, industry, and commerce account for less than one-fourth of the labor force
- **Overall Unemployment Rate:** 27% (2014 est.)
- **Unemployment Youth ages 15-24:** total: 24.5% male: 23.5% female: 34.6% (2014 est.)

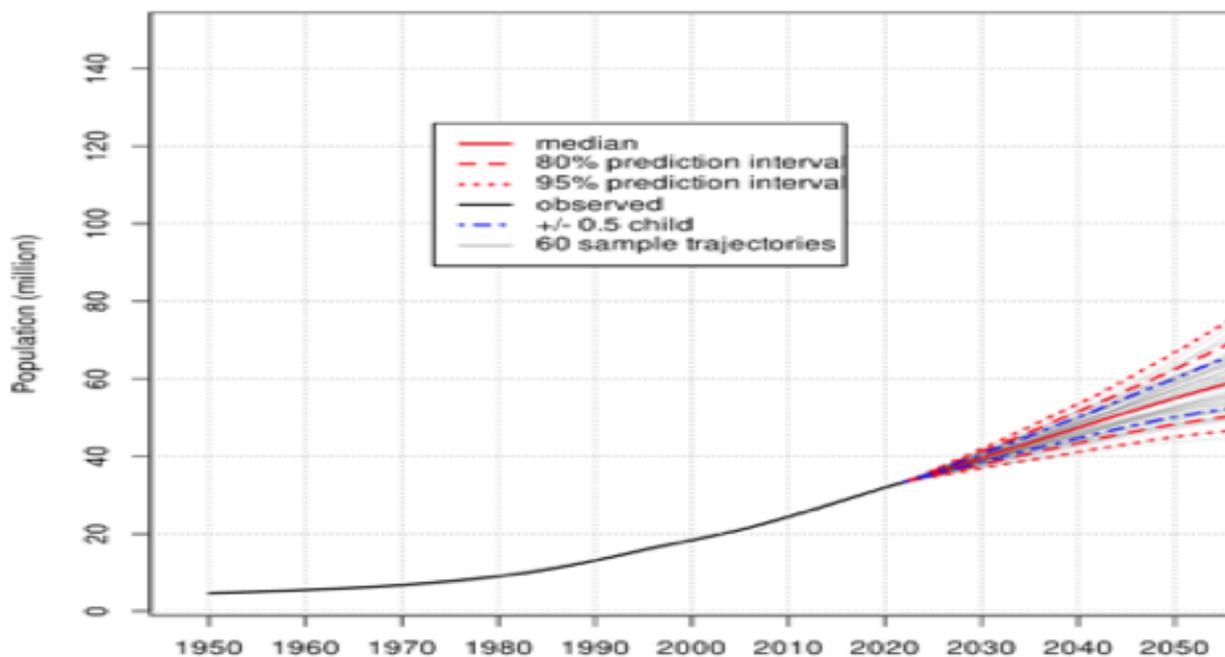
Yemen: Total Population Growth (In Millions)

World Bank



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=YE>

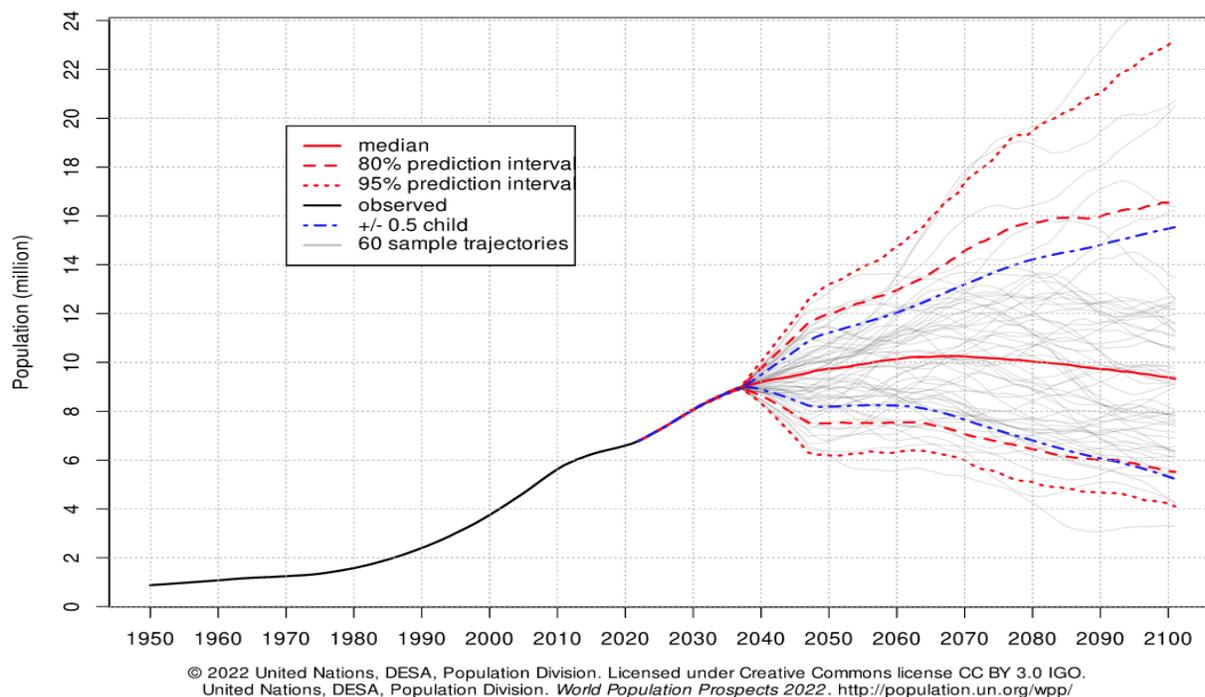
UN: 1950-2050



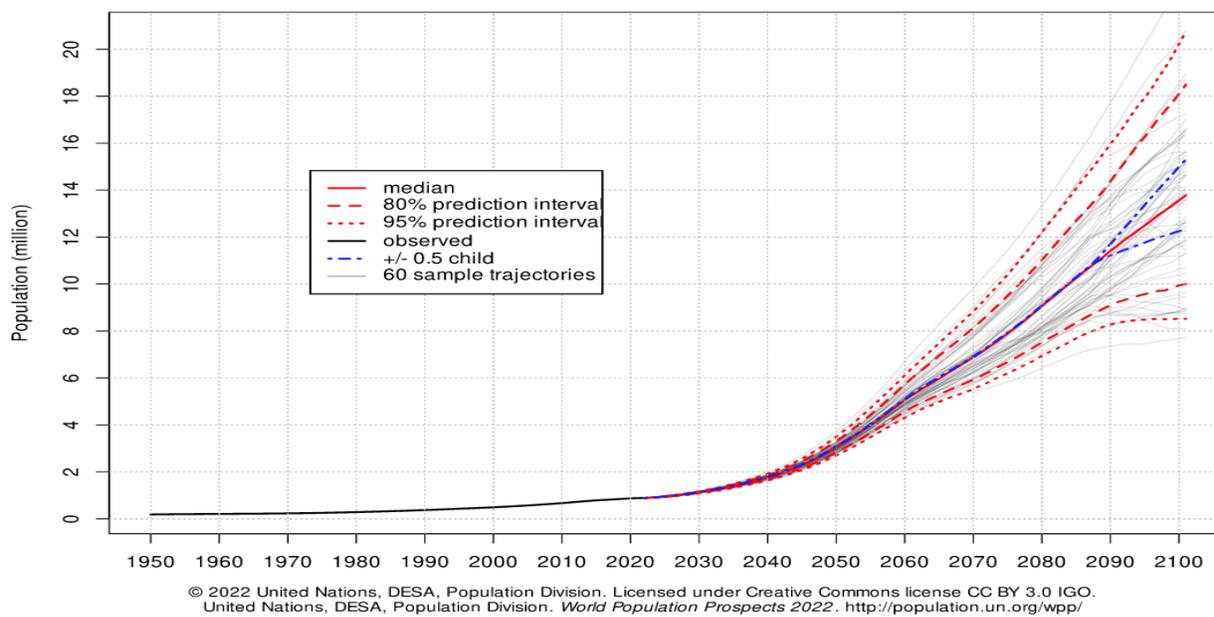
Source: United Nations, DESA Population Division, edited to limit projections to 2050, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/887>

Yemen: Warning Signs: Entry to Labor Force Age, and Seniors 65 and Over

UN: Population Age 15-24

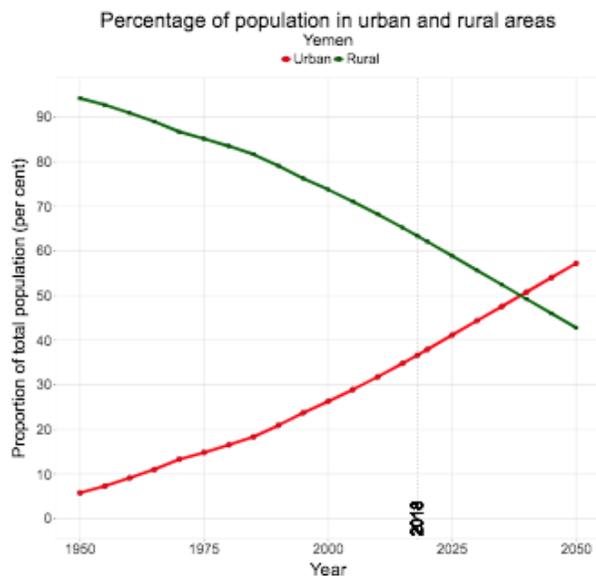


UN: Age 65 and Over



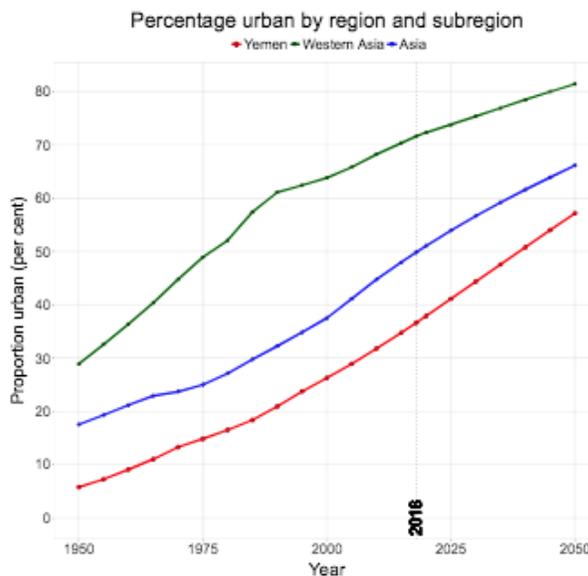
Source: United Nations, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/887>

Yemen: Shifts from Rural to Urban Market-Driven Population



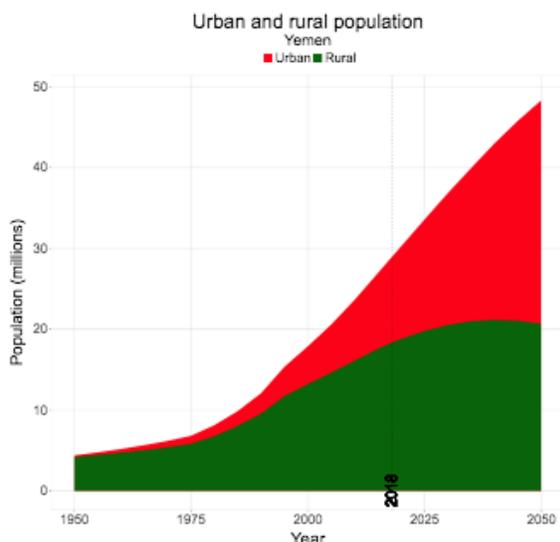
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Note: Urban and rural population in the current country or area as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



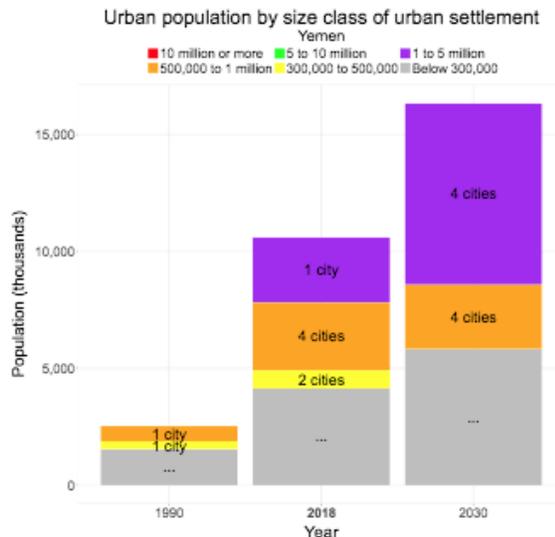
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Note: Proportion of urban population in the current country as compared to its subregion and region. The proportion is expressed as a percentage of the total population, 1950 to 2050.



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Note: Urban population by size class of urban settlement and number of cities, 1990, 2018 and 2030. The grey area is a residual category that includes all urban settlements with a population of less than 300,000 inhabitants.

ⁱ The reader should be aware that international statistics vary sharply even when issued by the government of many countries for that country. This report draws on two major international organizations, but the U.S. Census Bureau provides its own country-by country projections through 2100 as part of its International Data Base as well as some statistical summary data that do not always agree with data provided by the State Department, Department of Defense, and CIA for the same country and some year. The reader can explore these databases at https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/idb/#/country?COUNTRY_YEAR=2022&COUNTRY_YR_ANIM=2022&FIPS_SINGLE=AG.

ⁱⁱ Estimates of the impact of climate change are still very much in development but the World Bank has completed a very detailed pioneering study of such issues. See World Bank, *Groundswell Part II: Acting on Internal Climate Migration*, 2021, for a detailed modeling effort covering all of the countries in the MENA region, as well as water and agricultural issues and some aspects of governance, stability, and development. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/09/13/climate-change-could-force-216-million-people-to-migrate-within-their-own-countries-by-2050>. An earlier World Bank survey focusing on water issues provides additional background. See World Bank, *Beyond Scarcity: Water Security in the Middle East and North Africa*. MENA Development Report; Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/27659>.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a more detailed analysis see Jamal, Pagliani, and Hsu; *Citizenship 360° in the Arab Region: Perceptions on Sustainable Development Across Countries, Income, and Gender*, UN Arab Development Report Research Paper, UN Development Program, 2020.